FIRST JUNE ISSUE, 1919
VOL. XXI No. 5

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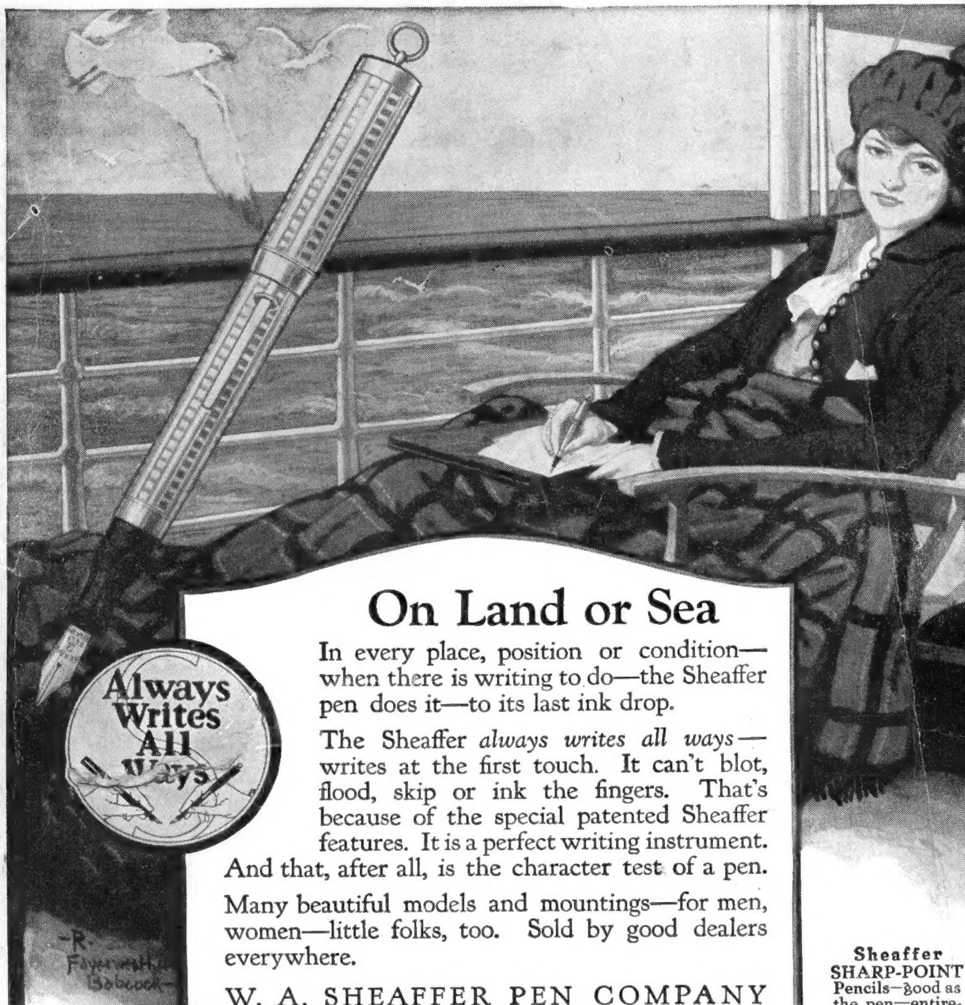

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Why My Memory Rarely Fails Me

and how the secret of a good memory may be learned in a single evening

By David M. Roth

Note: When I asked Mr. Roth to tell in his own words, for nation-wide publication, the remarkable story of the development of his system for the cure of bad memories, I found him reluctant to talk about himself in cold print. When I reminded him that he could do no finer service than to share his story with others—just as he is sharing his method for obtaining a better memory with thousands who are studying his famous Memory Course—he cordially agreed to my proposal. And here is his story—President Independent Corporation.

Fifty members of the Rotary Club were seated in the banquet hall of the Hotel McAlpin in New York. I was introduced to each member in turn, and each gave me his telephone number and told me his occupation. An hour later, after they had changed seats while my back was turned to them, I called each man by name, gave his telephone number and named his occupation, without a single error.

The following evening, in the office of a large business institution, I asked the president of the concern to write down fifty words, numbers and names, and to number each item. An hour later I called out each item, and gave the number opposite which it had been written.

From Seattle to New York I have appeared before salesmen's meetings, conventions, and Rotary Clubs giving demonstrations of my memory. I have met over 10,000 people in my travels. Yet I am quite sure I can call nearly every one of these men and women by name the instant I meet them, ask most of them how the lumber business is or the shoe business or whatever business they were in when I was first introduced to them.

I explained my memory system to a number of friends and they could hardly believe it possible. But some of them tried my method and invariably they told me they had doubled their memory power in a week. They got the method the first evening and then developed it as far as they cared to go.

The principles which I had formulated in improving my own memory were so simple and so easy to apply that I decided to give my method to the world.

At first I taught my memory system in person. My classes, in Rotary Clubs, banks, department stores, railway offices, manufacturing plants and every kind of business institution grew amazingly in size and number.

I soon realized that I could never hope to serve more than a small fraction of those who needed my memory system and were eager to take it up unless I put it into a home-study course which people could acquire without personal instruction.

The Independent Corporation, whose President, Mr. Karl V. S. Howland, had become interested in my work as a member of my Rotary Club class in New York, saw the large possibilities of my Course as an element in their broad program for personal efficiency and self-improvement.

So it was my pleasure to join forces with this great publishing house, and the Roth Memory Course, in seven simple lessons, was offered to the public.

Letters of praise began to pour in almost as fast as the lessons were shipped—and have kept up ever since in a veritable flood.

For example, Major E. B. Craft, Assistant Chief Engineer of the Western Electric Company, New York wrote:

> "Last evening was the first opportunity I had to study the course, and in one sitting I succeeded in learning the list of 100 words forward and backward, and to say that I am delighted with the method, is putting it very mildly. I feel already that I am more than repaid in the real value and enjoyment that I have got out of the first lesson."

And here is just a quotation from H. Q. (Multigraph) Smith, Division Manager of the Multigraph Sales Co. Ltd., in Montreal:

> "Here is the whole thing in a nutshell: Mr. Roth has a most remarkable Memory Course. It is simple, and easy as falling off a log. Yet with one hour a day of practice anyone—I don't care who he is—can improve his Memory in a week and have a good memory in six months."

Men and women from coast to coast have thanked me for having made it so easy for them to acquire an infallible memory. As one man said:

> "Memory and good judgment go hand in hand. Our judgment is simply the conclusions we draw from our experience, and our experience is only the sum total of what we remember. I now store away in my mind every valuable fact that relates to my business, whether it is something I hear or read, and when the proper time comes I recall all the facts I need. Before I studied the Roth Course it took me three times as long to gain experience simply because I forgot so many facts."

Thousands of sales have been lost because the salesman forgot some selling-point that would have closed the order. Many men when they are called upon to speak fail to put over their message or to make a good impression because they are unable to remember just what they wanted to say.

Many decisions involving thousands of dollars have been made unwisely because the man responsible didn't remember all the facts bearing on the situation, and thus used poor judgment. In fact, there is not a day but that the average business man forgets to do from one to a dozen things that would have increased his profits. There are no greater words in the English language descriptive of business inefficiency than the two little words, "I forgot."

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So confident is the Independent Corporation, the publishers of the Roth Memory Course, that once you have an opportunity to see in your own home how easy it is to double, yes, triple your memory power in a few short hours, that they are willing to send the course on free examination.

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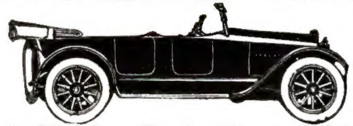

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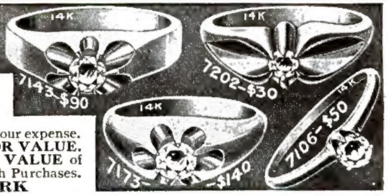


If you want to know what men buy

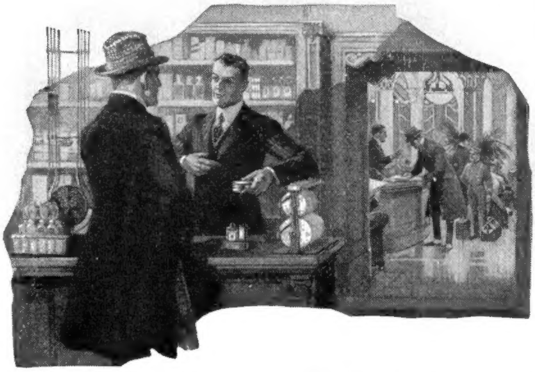
ask the proprietor of a hotel drug store. You know—the snappy little store with a back entrance opening into the hotel lobby. He gets practically all of the traveling man trade.

Now you may not know it, but when traveling men get to buying an article regularly, it's a certain sign that the general public will do likewise. Traveling men are the wisest and gamest buyers in the world. They are not afraid of a new idea and you can't come too strong for them on quality.

I make it a point therefore to check up, from time to time, the sale of Mennen's Shaving Cream to traveling men. In the last month, nine hotel drug store buyers have told me that they sell more of Mennen's than of all other shaving creams put together.

"I've noticed" said one buyer, "that a man who has used Mennen's always likes to talk about it. Mennen's has more real friends than any article in the store."

By the way, the green and white barber pole tube of Mennen's Shaving Cream is a common sight, nowadays, in

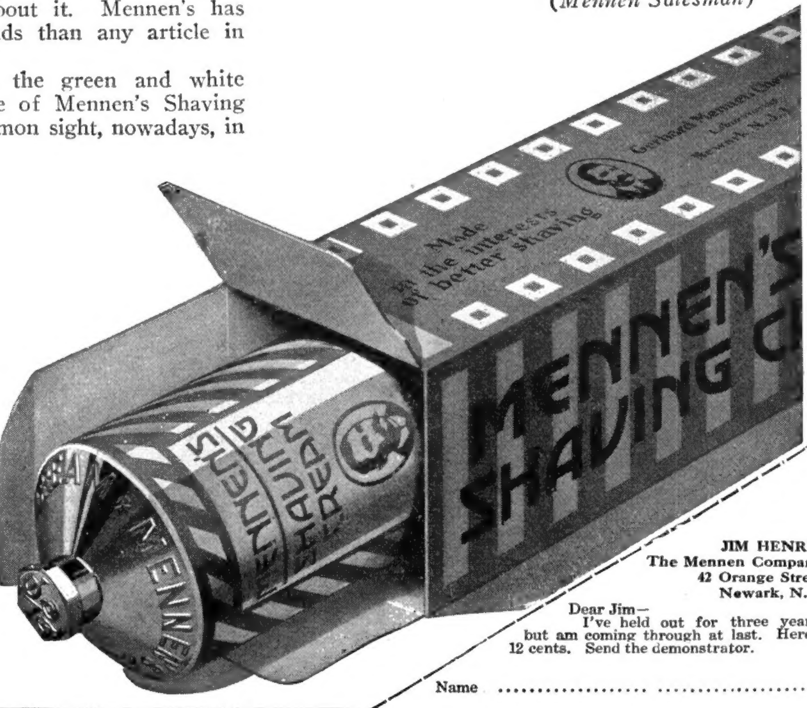


Pullman dressing rooms. If there was any way of deciding, I'd bet hard money that 75% of traveling men inject a little happiness into their lives each morning with a cold water lather of Mennen's. Mennen users don't mind Mr. Pullman's little joke of putting a hot water sign on one of his cold water faucets. A cold water lather of Mennen's will soften your beard wonderfully and stimulate the skin as well.

Send for a 12 cent demonstrator tube and prove it. Remember—three minutes work with the brush—no rubbing—and use a lot of water.

Jim Henry

(*Mennen Salesman*)



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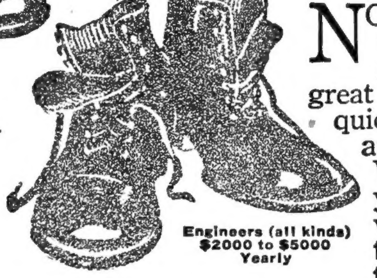

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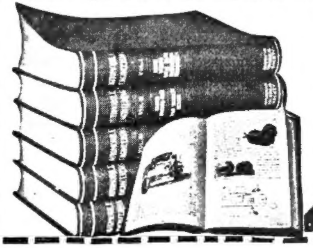

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VOL. 21
NO. 5

JUNE 3, 1919

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SALT OF THE SEA

A Two-Part Story Part I

By J. ALLAN DUNN

In which you adventure to the New World and the Spanish Main with Francis Drake.

THE HUMAN BLOODHOUND

By CAPTAIN R. S. CARPENTER

A Secret Service story by a former Secret Service man.

AUGUSTE and THE SUPREME BEING

By AGNES and EGERTON CASTLE

A story of France under the Reign of Terror.

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MID-JUNE ISSUE

Adventure
Registered in the United States Patent Office
JUNE 3, 1919
VOL. 21, NO. 3

THE SPIRITS OF SPIRIT LAKE

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by
KATHRENE AND ROBERT PINKERTON

Authors of "A Saga of Men," "The Hidden Cabin," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE POST AT SPIRIT LAKE

"I GUESS we not go to Spirit Lake," announced the half-breed casually.

"I guess we do," answered Jimmie Wells indignantly. "I hired you to take me there, and you've got to do it."

"I guess we not go," was the reply in that calm, aggravating tone only an Indian can use.

Jimmie Wells was about to explode in angry denunciation when something about the situation that was mysteriously familiar held him silent. He looked about the camp site uncertainly, a little dazed by the suddenly awakened memory, for never before had he been deserted by a guide. Then he remembered.

There had been such a situation; only it was Marshall Wells, his father, who had been the victim. Tom Gill, the old woodsman, who was with him at the time, had often told the story of how, when on their way to rescue Jimmie Dunn in the Barren Grounds, their Indians had deserted them far north of Lake Athabasca.

"It hit us hard, that," Tom had often said, "and with a ton and a half of grub lying there on the beach and the snow falling even if it was the middle of Summer, I thought we'd have to quit. But your father never missed a step, lad. Not him. He remembered Jimmie Dunn up there waiting for him to come, and he didn't even waste time cussing the 'bows and arrows.' We piled the grub into those two big freighting Peterboroughs and shoved off, just the two of us. I didn't see any chance of our getting there, let along getting back with Jimmie Dunn. But there was one thing your father never learned to do in the bush, lad, and that was to walk back in his own tracks."

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As a boy Jimmie Wells had never tired of hearing the story of which the foregoing was only the beginning, and his pleasure in it even now brought delight to his eyes that mystified the half-breed.

"All right," he said. "Take your family and go back if you're too tired to paddle fifty miles farther. I'm going on to Spirit Lake."

The half-breed glanced up as if he were about to protest, but Jimmie Wells had turned away and was busy loading a canoe. He worked quickly, buoyed up by the memory of Tom Gill's familiar words, and yet he grinned sheepishly as he bent over a pack. The situations were similar to a certain extent, but, where his father had faced almost certain death in an effort to rescue a friend, he now was confronted only by a long day's paddle over an unmistakable route to the security of a Hudson's Bay Company post and the companionship of his father's old friend, Alan McKerral.

Jimmie knew very well, from what he had heard of the experience of his father and Jimmie Dunn through twelve years of exploration in the Barren Grounds, that argument was useless. The man had said that he would not go, and that settled it.

He could accept this fact the more philosophically because what would have been a tragedy to another was to him a joyous occasion. Although he had been a wilderness traveler since he was first able to swing a small paddle, he had never been alone; never been able to feel that solely upon him depended the success of the expedition.

Now, completely out of reach of civilization, he knew that his own skill must take him to this lonely Hudson's Bay post. The spirit of adventure which had been born in him, heritage from his explorer father, thrilled to the test, and, as he finished loading his canoe, he began to sing.

"What you going do?" asked the half-breed.

"I'm going to Spirit Lake Post."

The man shook his head and looked at the ground, and for the first time Jimmie connected his guide's refusal to go farther with a long mid-stream conversation when they had met an Indian hunter and his family the previous afternoon. Solely out of curiosity, for he did not expect that the man would change his mind, he sought the reason.

"It's easy, you said, compared with what we've gone through," he remarked. "This river with two portages and then a few miles down the lake. That ought to be easy."

"The portages they long."

"But you told me they were short and that there were no bad rapids."

The half-breed remained silent, and Jimmie continued to probe.

"You have all Summer to make the trip."

"Me have to hurry back to get ready for next Winter's hunt."

Jimmie laughed outright.

"What's happened at Spirit Lake Post?" he asked. "Some one there you're afraid of?"

"Not some one," answered the man resentfully. "Not any man. It's the spirits of Spirit Lake."

"Spirits of Spirit Lake! What spirits?"

"The spirits that were there long time ago. Indians always afraid to go near that lake, but the Hudson's Bay Company come and drive them all away, and the Indians been there now more than hundred years."

"Then why are you afraid?"

"The spirits they all come back, the *windigoes*, lots of them, and now all the Indians go away because the spirits they going to drive the Hudson's Bay Company away just like it drive them away long time ago."

"You don't mean the spirits will drive white men away?" asked Jimmie, for he was familiar with the common Indian belief that the red man's medicine and spirits are powerless against the fair-skinned race.

"That lake one time the home of all the big spirits, all the bad big spirits," explained the half-breed. "When the Hudson's Bay Company drive them away, they don't have a home, and for hundred years they just go round looking for nice place to live. But they don't find it, and now they come back to Spirit Lake, and they going to stay there."

"That Indian we met yesterday told you about this, eh?"

The man nodded.

"Did he just come from Spirit Lake?"

"No. Another Indian tell him."

"I thought so," Jimmie laughed.

His father and Jimmie Dunn had told him much of Indian character and Indian superstitions and a great deal of the history and methods of the Hudson's Bay Company. He recognized in the half-breed's story merely a wild forest rumor and a desire to return home, and he completed his preparations for departure."

"You going to Spirit Lake Post?" asked the man anxiously.

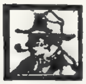
"Sure, I'm going. Worrying about your pay? I was going to settle with you at the post, but here's an order on the company, one of the sort they issue to travelers, and you can cash it in at any post."

He handed the slip of paper to the half-breed, who continued to look anxiously at the loaded canoe.

"Afraid of that order?" asked Jimmie.

"No. Me see them before. But that bad place, that Spirit Lake. You come with me."

"I have some medicine that will fix the worst spirits in Canada," laughed Jimmie. "*B'ou'*, and don't work too hard on the way home."



HE SHOVED off into the current and was whirled away down-stream. When he looked back from the first bend, the half-breed and his wife and children were sitting on the bank stolidly watching him.

While Jimmie's spirits were high, it was not entirely upon a holiday excursion that he was embarked. He was going to Spirit Lake for a purpose, though he did not know it. He ascribed his time spent in boys' camps in northern Wisconsin and on the great Ontario game-preserve in which his father and Jimmie Dunn were large holders, his long canoe trips through all the country immediately north of Lake Superior and made in the company of his father's old exploring companion, Tom Gill, to his own love for the wilderness.

He never suspected that it was all part of a plan, was a method of training him for the big adventure, and he never dreamed that his present trip to Spirit Lake Post was to be the finishing bit of schooling, the final polishing for the "real thing" in the Barren Grounds.

Jimmie knew, of course, of this expedition. He could not remember when the journey had not been talked of. He had even realized dimly that to his father and to Uncle Jimmie it was more than a mere trip into the beloved North Country, that it was, in fact, a sort of farewell to their own adventurous youth. But, that it was intended to weave for Jimmie a spell that would make of him the man that the two older men wanted him to be, he had never suspected.

Jimmie was only a month old when his father, who had put the North behind him, again went out to rescue his companion of twelve years, Jimmie Dunn, who had been held captive by a band of renegade Chippewyans whose chief hunter was turning white, a condition for which their leader blamed the explorer.

It was when with these Indians that Jimmie Dunn had learned of an oasis in the great white desert, of a small tract of timber far out in the desolate waste, said to be inhabited by a band of Indians who had never seen white men and who lived on the game that sought shelter with them from the Arctic blasts. And it was Jimmie Dunn, reluctantly giving up the Northland after his friend's sacrifice, who had suggested the final journey to this island in the Barren Grounds, the journey that must be the last for the explorers and their woodsman companion, Tom Gill, and the introduction of "Jimmie Lad," as Tom had named him, to the "real thing."

It was Jimmie Dunn who, after the death of the boy's mother, had constituted himself a co-parent and had devised the system of training. Each year the boy went on a little longer journey, was subjected to more severe hardships, was allowed more opportunities for the exercise of his own initiative and the development of his resourcefulness. Tom Gill had been the teacher, and, when Jimmie was twenty, he proclaimed him fit.

"He's as good in the bush as you two ever were," he announced proudly. "He'll out-Indian an Indian in most things, and I wouldn't be afraid to start him out to-morrow for the North Pole. And I want to tell you two something. You've been living in Chicago a long time, sitting at desks, and you're both fifty or more. My advice is that you get out and do a little training yourselves, or the lad will think he's being taken along as a nurse instead of being shown the real thing."

The two old explorers laughed derisively, though the woodsman's statement bit deeply, and Jimmie Dunn, to change the subject, said:

"One more trip for him. Next Spring we'll send him up for a few months with Alan McKerral. He's post-manager at Spirit Lake now and he's an old-time Hudson's Bay man. Spirit Lake Post is isolated, but it's the richest post in the district, and conditions haven't changed at all in a hundred years. Let Jimmie Lad go up as soon as the ice goes out and come out the next Winter. It isn't the Barren Grounds, but it will give him a touch of what's coming to him."

Jimmie Lad had wanted to make the three-hundred-mile journey to the post alone, but his father had insisted upon a guide. Now that the guide had deserted him, he reveled in the sensation of being alone in the Northland. He was twenty-one, but even to a man of fifty may come the enchantment of the wide, far places, the exhilaration of those who have been first in new lands, the romantic glamour which the North always has for those who know and love it.

He swept on down-stream, paddling steadily, exulting in the swift miles that dropped astern, allowing his imagination to run riot and picturing himself as old-time factor, post-runner, even one of the fabled *coureurs de bois*. With all his experience in the North woods, Jimmie had never seen a Hudson's Bay Company post, and the fact that this ambition was soon to be realized added to his elation.

All day he kept on down-stream, and he did not stop paddling until darkness came and the river swept out into a large lake. He knew his destination was only a few miles down the shore to the right, and, when he crawled into his little tent, his last thought was of the new world he was about to enter.

Jimmie caught his first glimpse of the post when he was still three miles down the lake. It was as he had pictured it so often. The cluster of whitewashed buildings shone white in the sunlight, with the great, green clearing as a background. Framing it all was the darker green of the dense spruce forest. It was like a painting in the still, early Summer morning.

A little later he caught the thin line of the tall flagpole against the sky. Because no banner floated from the peak, he knew that the manager was at home.

But, when only a mile away, he began to have his first misgivings. He had expected something imposing, something in accord with the traditions and scope of the great company. Now the buildings appeared to be small, low, grouped without design. Yet somehow they seemed in keeping with the efforts of man in that vast wilderness, properly humble and insignificant, and they brought no break in the desolate landscape.

Before this disappointment had struck deeply, other facts impressed themselves. The hunters should be in with the last of the Winter's fur, yet there was not a tent or wigwam anywhere in the clearing. No smoke rose from the drying-racks or from the dwelling-house. No yellow birch-bark canoes were turned upside down on the rocky shore.

His anxious scrutiny revealed no sign of life. No group of hunters gathered before the door of the store. No children ran screaming about the great clearing or played along the water's edge. There were no dogs sneaking about the wigwams and buildings in search of something to steal. To all outward appearances the post was deserted.

JIMMIE landed at a dock of poles in front of the dwelling-house. No inquisitive dogs came to snap at his heels. No black head appeared at a window. He stood for a moment undecided, for, despite his desire to believe that it was all explainable, there came to him a vague feeling of desolation and loneliness.

In an effort to throw this off, he strode toward the dwelling-house. He walked heavily across the veranda and knocked loudly on the door. There was no answer.

He tried the door of the store. Even before he knocked, the heavy padlock told the futility of expecting to find any one.

He walked to the rear, where the servants' cabins, the warehouse and the Indian house were clustered. All seemed deserted. It was, indeed, as if the spirits of Spirit Lake had driven off every human being who might dispute their right to live in their ancient home.

Smiling at the idea, Jimmie returned to the dwelling-house and tried the front door. It gave before his pressure, and, as he entered, he called the name of Alan McKerral. There was no answer.

He went out again and walked around the clearing. He found ample evidence of the recent occupancy of the most favored camp sites by the Indian hunters and their families. Old moccasins lay in the grass. Flies swarmed about the places where the squaws had cooked. Spruce and cedar branches were matted on the ground where the beds had been. But the wigwam poles and drying-racks stood bare and forlorn.

Jimmie Lad went back into the dwelling-house and walked through the empty rooms. The uninviting remains of a meal were on the dining-room table. The kitchen stove was cold, but a kettle of meat stood upon it. It was still fresh.

He went into the bedroom and found it in order, except that the bed had not been made since the last occupancy.

Jimmie walked outside. Lake and land were equally deserted. Not a moving thing was to be seen. He made a round of the servants' houses. All were unlocked, and he found them empty of everything except a few lithographs on the walls and the stoves in the middle of the main rooms. He tried the door of the warehouse, but, like the store, it was padlocked.

"Not a soul!" he muttered as he returned to the dwelling-house. "By George! The spirits of Spirit Lake!"

He laughed as he again surveyed the empty scene. There was something ominous in what he had found, something uncanny in the complete order of dwelling-house and surroundings, the mounting evidence that something had suddenly swept manager, servants and hunters away. But Jimmie Lad had heard a great deal of Indian superstitions and Indian character, and he knew that no legend would ever drive out an old Hudson's Bay man like Alan McKerral.

"There's just one thing that's happened," he decided. "Every one's gone on a big picnic like the one father told about. McKerral packed up the entire outfit and went off for a good time, probably fishing or hunting or something of that sort. The chances are they'll be back tonight."

No one appeared that night, and Jimmie made himself at home in the dwelling-house, cooking his meals in the kitchen and occupying McKerral's bed. The next morning he wandered about the post, examining the old fur-press before the store, the York boats overturned on the beach, the dog kennels, the Indian house and the interior of the store from what he could see through the windows.

Occasionally he watched the lake for signs of an approaching fleet of canoes. He was neither lonely nor alarmed. Simply being in a Hudson's Bay Company post, even without the atmosphere furnished by hunters, servants and manager, was enough for a time.

But in the middle of the forenoon he began to think a bit uneasily of the half-breed's story. Despite himself, misgivings came. He sought for new clues as to the reason for the absence of the several hundred persons who should have been there, but he could not discover anything that offered an explanation.

Jimmie Lad decided to extend the field of his investigation and took his rifle and walked along the lake shore. He went north until he came to the edge of the clearing and then, back in the spruce, circled around until he struck the lake south of the post. He walked close to the water, watching always for signs of anything that would explain the desertion of Spirit Lake Post.

A quarter of a mile from the buildings he turned back from the lake to cross a small stream that flowed through the clearing. Brush grew along the creek, and he pushed it aside to look across before he leaped.

At his feet, lying on its back, a bloated, distorted face staring up at him, was the body of a man, evidently a half-breed. There was no sign of a wound on head, face or throat. The clothing was unpunctured by knife or bullet.

CHAPTER II

THE EMPTY FUR LOFT

FOR a full minute Jimmie stood above the body. He was not frightened, did not draw back in horror. His mind was completely occupied with other things, for there had come to him instantly a realization of the fact that Spirit Lake Post was deserted or had been abandoned, that no picnic or hunting or fishing excursion had taken manager, servants and hunters away.

In a flash he jumped at a conclusion. There was something in the half-breed's story of the evil spirits returning to Spirit Lake. The Indians believed it. That explained the absence of every hunter and his family. Superstitious fear had driven them away.

As for the superstition, he immediately ascribed that to a rival fur company, a "free-trader," as they were still sometimes called, or "the opposition," a blanket term used by servants of the company to designate any and all rivals. From books and from the many stories of his father and Jimmie Dunn he had learned much of the methods and customs of the fur trade.

He saw instantly that a rival company had started the story among the hunters in an effort to undermine the Hudson's Bay Company, to drive the hunters from the post; and he knew that somewhere not too far away this company had established a post and would gather in the last of the Winter's fur and establish itself firmly for the next season. Such things had been done.

But, and it was to this point that Jimmie Lad's mind plunged quickly through the others, what had become of Alan McKerral? Since boyhood Jimmie had heard much of this old servant of the company, of his unflinching loyalty, of his many victorious bouts with the opposition. It was he who had saved the life of Marshall Wells nearly thirty years before in the Barren Grounds; who had, when alone and two hundred miles from the nearest white man, bluffed down a band of Beaver Indians bent upon destroying his post.

His life was a long record of success in the fur lands. He had served in many districts, and Jimmie Dunn and Marshall Wells had seen much of him in their exploring days. One of those friendships which only the far places produce had sprung up between the three. Jimmie Wells had heard much of him, and, when McKerral had visited them in Chicago for a month several years before, the post-manager easily ascended to the top niche in the boy's collection of Northland idols.

The young man's concern now was as great as had been his admiration. From all indications McKerral had departed without preparation. With evidences of an old-time fur war before him, Jimmie Lad believed that the manager, too, had been a victim in a battle for pelts which savored more of the old Northwest Company days than the comparative peace of the present.

Convinced of this, he immediately sprang across the creek and climbed the bank on the other side. As he neared the top, he suddenly dropped flat on the ground. When he had left the post two hours before, he had walked along the edge of the water, out of sight from the clearing, until he had reached the spruce timber at the north. His circle to the south end of the clearing had been made in the shelter of the forest, and from there he had again walked beneath the bank on the lake shore.

If the post had been deserted, one man had been killed, and, if McKerral had disappeared, it was still a dangerous place. If he had been watched, if his absence were noted, he must reconnoiter before approaching the buildings openly, as he would now be compelled to do.

Cautiously Jimmie looked through the low brush that bordered the edge of the creek's high banks. He saw the buildings, white against the green, deserted as they had been since his arrival. He glanced out over the lake, the broad, blue surface of which was unbroken by any craft. The clearing lay empty.

Jimmie lifted himself slowly and looked again. From his position he could see the front door of the store and of the dwelling-house, and for five minutes he watched them. Since his arrival at the post, he had waited eagerly for the appearance of some one. Now he dreaded seeing any living thing, believing it could be only an enemy.

Satisfied at last that there was no one at the post, Jimmie Lad arose to his feet. From this position he again swept the landscape. Half-way between the rear of the buildings and the edge of the spruce something dark and moving caught his eye. At first he believed it was a dog, or possibly a wolf or bear, crawling forward in the high grass. Then a man's head was slowly lifted for a moment, and the slow, cautious progress continued.

Jimmie dropped at once below the edge of the bank. His first and only idea was to keep out of sight, to await an opportunity to get his canoe and packs away from the post and then to return to the railroad three hundred miles to the south. As he lay there planning to do this, he glanced back and saw the body of the dead man across the creek.

"There was one thing your father never learned to do in the bush, lad, and that was to walk back in his own tracks."

Tom Gill's familiar words flashed through his mind, and with them came the realization that the son was planning to do that very thing. He was thinking only of getting out quickly and safely. And behind him he was leaving his father's old friend, the man who had once saved his father's life. Perhaps McKerral was dead, but perhaps he was still alive and needed help.

There was only one thing his father would do, and Jimmie immediately decided upon the same course.

With the decision came an added thrill. All his life Jimmie Lad had hidden a desire to become a servant of the Hudson's Bay Company. His father's stories, Tom Gill's long tales, the books he had read—all had fostered and developed a romantic conception of the life of a fur trader that his recent ascendency to manhood had not destroyed. He knew such an ambition would never be fulfilled, yet it had always persisted.

Now had come the opportunity. He could not become a full-fledged servant, rising to post-managership through the usual apprenticeship of five years. His name would not even be on the company's books. But he could serve it as faithfully as any old Scotchman who had come over to Canada as a boy; could feel for a day at least the power and the might of the company as exercised through him at this lonely post.

Instantly Jimmie Lad was again at the top of the bank. The black figure in the grass had almost reached the rear of the warehouse. In a moment it was behind it and then came into view on the other side, running swiftly across to the door of the kitchen. As it disappeared within the building, Jimmie Lad arose to his feet. He had seen that the man was unarmed, and he dashed across the three hundred yards of open ground that lay between him and the post.

He reached the kitchen door without again seeing the stranger. He threw the door open and held his rifle ready.

IN A corner, where he was helping himself at the open cupboard, stood an old Indian, his mouth filled with cold bannock, his eyes lighted with pleasure. Before Jimmie Lad could speak he mumbled through the bread—

"Me glad you come."

"Who are you?" demanded Jimmie Lad.

"Me Dominique McFarlan."

He spoke as if the name were enough, and he continued to look at Jimmie Lad with undisguised satisfaction.

"Yes," said the young man impatiently, "but who are you?"

"Me Dominique McFarlan," was the surprized reply. "My father Pierson McFarlan. His father Duncan McFarlan. He chief factor at Norway House eighty years ago. My mother she part Frenchwoman. My father he factor at this post long time ago. Me live here all my life. Start work for Hudson's Bay Company when me fourteen years old. Work for it fifty years now. Pretty soon get a pension. You Hudson's Bay man and never hear of McFarlans?"

He stared at Jimmie in undisguised amazement as he continued to cram bannock into his mouth. Jimmie felt that the man was telling the truth. He could see that he was not a full-blooded Indian, and he knew that many descendants of the old-time factors who had married Indian women were in the company's service. Still he could not take a chance, and he ignored the old fellow's last remark when he asked:

"Where is McKerral?"

Dominique shrugged his shoulders but did not speak.

"Haven't you any idea?" persisted Jimmie Lad.

"McKerral he been gone more than two days. Me no see him."

"Where are the servants, and where are all the hunters who should be here now?"

"All gone."

"I can see that. But where?"

"Everywhere. Hunters just scatter through the bush. One night clearing full of wigwams. Next morning nothing. Then two days more and McKerral gone, too. Servants leave just as soon as they know that. McKerral send me over to outpost. When me get back everybody gone. You just come from district office?"

Jimmie Lad glanced at the man quickly. Evidently the old fellow believed he was a Hudson's Bay Company man. If he were to accomplish anything, if he hoped to find McKerral, he must play the part.

"Yes," he answered shortly. "We heard something was up, and I was sent out. What's at the bottom of all this? That spirit story?"

Dominique nodded.

"Did the hunters all believe it?"

"All of them. Me most believe it. Lights in the sky and noises out on the water and big stars sailing along in the air right over the post. Me hear about it month ago and tell McKerral. He no believe hunters go away. 'Where," he say, 'is opposition? No free-trader. Indians don't start such stories all alone. No opposition closer than two hundred miles. Just foolishness, Dominique,' he say."

"But didn't the opposition start the story about the spirits coming back to Spirit Lake?"

"How the opposition start story where there no opposition? Nobody here at the post see any one. Hunters never see sign of new post. They come in from everywhere and never hear of free-trader."

"Who did start the story, then?"

Dominique looked at the young man for a moment, his eyes keenly questioning, his jaws at rest for the first time. Jimmie Lad felt that he was being estimated, weighed, and he sensed that back of it all, back of every word and thought of the half-breed, was only a complete loyalty to the company he had served all his life.

"Listen," Dominique finally began. "Me work for Hudson's Bay Company for fifty years, and my father and his father work only for the company. All our lives we do nothing else. The company it like the church in our family. They all know that, the chief factors in the old days and the district managers now—and the commissioner, too. Whatever we do, it for the company always."

He stopped and stepped closer to Jimmie Lad.

"Now listen," and he emphasized his slowly enunciated words with a paddle-crooked forefinger waved before the young man's nose. "Alan McKerral he start the story about the spirits. He tell some Indian and the next day all the Indians know it."

"That's nonsense!" exclaimed Jimmie Lad.

"Now listen minute. There no opposition anywhere near Spirit Lake. No free-trader come in all Winter or this Spring. Every bit of fur come to this post. Then this story about spirits driving out Indians and white men start. Fires in the sky and bad noises one night. Next morning every hunter gone. Then what McKerral do? Nothing. He stay in bed most all day. Won't let any one come into store.

"McKerral send me off to Sucker Lake Outpost. Just little while ago me get back. Down on Sucker Lake River yesterday me meet all the servants in canoes running away. They say: 'Come, too. McKerral gone. Spirits get him. They get you if you go back.' Me tell them: 'No, I guess not. Company not like it if every one run away.'

"This morning I come across swamp to the post. No grub yesterday, and, when me no see no one, me come here to get something to eat."

"But that doesn't prove that McKerral started this story," persisted Jimmie Lad.

"Listen," said Dominique solemnly. "Me know some things me not tell you, and me guess some things. One thing me guess is all the fur gone from the store, and we take in seventy-five thousand dollars this Winter."

"Gone! Who would take it?"

"McKerral," answered Dominique.

"That's absurd. McKerral has worked for the company more than thirty years, and there isn't a man in the service who has been a more successful post-manager. McKerral would never do such a thing."

"Me know he old-time Hudson's Bay man. Everybody know about McKerral. Me like him, too. Fine man to work for. But you come over to the store, and we see."

He went out of the kitchen, and Jimmie followed. The old man drew a ring of keys from a pocket, and, as he inserted one in the padlock on the front door of the store, he said:

"Remember. The brigade she not go out this Summer. The York boats right there yet on the shore. No fur go out for a year. This Winter we take in seventy-five thousand dollars' worth. McKerral say himself it best this post ever do. Now come."

He swung open the door and entered. Walking on through, he climbed the stairs at the rear to the loft. Jimmie Lad was at his heels, and, as they stood together on the second floor, they looked around.

Not a piece of fur, not a bale, was in sight. The place was empty where it should have been full of bales. The post had been looted; a fortune in furs was gone—and with them Alan McKerral.

CHAPTER III

THE FINAL EVIDENCE

"FOR fifty years that fur always stay right there until the York boats go," said Dominique. "It all baled and ready and this week the brigade should start."

"But how could one man get away with

all that fur?" demanded Jimmie Lad, who still refused to believe that his idol could be guilty of such treachery to the Hudson's Bay Company, a crime far greater in his eyes than the theft.

"I tell you. One night the lights come in the sky. The next morning all the hunters gone. Not a wigwam left. McKerral tell me not to go in the store. The next day he sleep late. When he wake up, he send me to Sucker Lake Outpost. Next day he sleep most all day; other servants tell me when I see them on Sucker Lake River. You see that? He work all night taking the fur away in a canoe. Ninety-two pieces there was. He cache that fur somewhere, and then he go away just like somebody took him. The servants they scared, and they go, and no one here to watch him. Then some one come in from outside, and they and McKerral go away with the fur."

"Do you really believe that?" asked Jimmie Lad.

"Me work here for McKerral for five years," said Dominique slowly. "He good manager. No opposition get fur from this post. He work hard. He keep the hunters satisfied. They get lots of fur. McKerral work for the Hudson's Bay Company all his life. Now the fur gone. McKerral gone."

"Didn't the servants see him taking it at night? I should think the dogs would have made a noise."

"The dogs all gone down to the island for the Summer. No dogs here. And the servants all scared of the spirits at night. That McKerral he got a long head."

"But why," objected Jimmie Lad, "should McKerral, after all these years with the company, do this thing? He's had big fur years before now, but he never tried this."

"Something else I didn't tell you," answered the old man doggedly. "You know that treaty money, twenty-five hundred dollars, it sent to McKerral this year. Always before Indian agent pay it. McKerral never even put it in the safe. Wear it all the time in a belt. Now that gone with the fur. Fur and money too big a chance. McKerral think he must have them."

Dominique shook his head mournfully. Jimmie felt that the old man was telling the truth—that he believed in McKerral's guilt only because circumstances compelled him to. Dominique was looking at the bare floor; there was sadness in his eyes.

"You know," he said suddenly, "I think I kill that McKerral if I find him."

"Kill him! Why?"

"My boy, Duncan McFarlan, he runner at this post. He good man. McKerral like him and help him and give him good job. McKerral say Duncan going to take my place when me get pension. Now Duncan gone, too. He gone with McKerral. My grandfather, my father, me, my boy—all work for Hudson's Bay Company; never nobody else. We always work well—always good servants. Now McKerral take my boy away with the fur."

Dominique's voice trembled as he spoke, but at the end his eyes hardened and the grim, undecipherable mask of the Indian slipped over his face.

"How do you know Duncan went with McKerral?" asked Jimmie Lad.

"He not here. He not with the servants on Sucker Lake River. Now me know why McKerral give him so many good jobs, always take Duncan with him when he go any place."

"What did Duncan look like? Was he tall or short, heavy or thin?"

"Duncan short, heavy. He strong boy. You see him?" and the old man looked eagerly at Jimmie Lad.

For a moment the young American hesitated. Then he turned to a shelf loaded with four-point blankets and took down a dark blue one.

"Get a spade, Dominique," he said, "and come with me."

He led the way across the clearing to the brush that fringed the little creek. When he reached the spot where he had found the body, he indicated that Dominique was to go first.

"Who is that?" he asked.

"Duncan!" cried the old man. "Duncan! He dead! My boy!"

He bent over the body for a moment, wholly given up to his grief. Then the Indian in his blood gained the ascendancy—as it always does, no matter what the proportion of white blood—and, when he straightened up, his face was expressionless. Then, to Jimmie Lad's amazement, he smiled happily.

"Duncan, he a Hudson's Bay man right to the end," he said proudly. "He see what McKerral doing. He try to stop it. He die trying to save the fur."

"Look, Dominique," said Jimmie. "There is no wound on his face or head, and there are no bullet-holes."

In answer the old man turned the body over. Beneath it was a mass of blood, blackened and caked, and a slit in the shirt showed where a knife had entered.

"That the only way any one ever kill Duncan!" cried Dominique proudly. "They have to sneak up behind and put the knife in his back. He brave boy, Duncan, and no one kill him from the front."

Together they rolled the body in the great blanket. Dominique insisted that it be borne to the little cemetery back of the post and be buried with his relatives, and it was noon before the task was finished.

Dominique cooked the meal in the kitchen of the dwelling-house but set only one place in the dining-room.

"Come in here with me," Jimmie Lad commanded. "We must get busy and there are a lot of things to talk over. We'll do it while we eat. Now, where is that fur?"

"It can't be far," answered Dominique as he sat down.

"Of course not. Ninety-two pieces at ninety pounds each makes more than eight thousand pounds. If McKerral did this alone in two nights, he couldn't have taken it far from the post. The only thing I'm afraid of is that he has taken it from the hiding-place before this."

"If he did, we see the signs," said Dominique. "We go look right after we eat."

There was not a foot of land or water within many miles of the post that the old man did not know intimately, and he did not hesitate when he and Jimmie started their search in a canoe.

"We go by water because he go by water with the fur," he said as he turned north along the shore. "Mile up here there an old Indian cabin. Maybe it there."

But there was no sign about the cabin that any one had been near it for years. They paddled to another half a mile beyond, but it, too, had not been used as a hiding-place. Back past the post they went to two more deserted cabins, but nowhere could they find indications of McKerral's activities.

"Maybe he hid it right at the post," suggested Jimmie Lad. "Is there any place he might have used as a cache?"

"There an old root-cellar!" exclaimed Dominique. "Once a manager here thought he raise potatoes. He go crazy about potatoes, and, before he plant them, he build a big cellar to put them in. Then he plant the potatoes, but all he ever get is little bag like trade-gun bullets."

They paddled back to the post, and Dominique led the way to the root-cellar at the rear of the warehouse. They entered, but, when Jimmie struck a match, they found the place was empty.

"We could look forever and never find it," said Jimmie Lad. "Besides, how do we know it is near here? If McKerral was in with some one, as you think, they would have taken it off before this."

"But listen," objected Dominique. "If that happens, what they carry the fur away in? It take two York boats to carry so many pieces. And, if there are others, why don't they all come and carry it away? They can do it in one night. No; that fur around here somewhere. By Geor', I know! It on the little rock island with the cave."

* * *

HE STARTED at once for the lake, Jimmie Lad following, and they paddled again down the shore to the south. A mile from the post and hidden from it by a point was a small island a quarter of a mile out from the mainland. A few scrub jack-pine and spruce clung to the rocks, which had been split and cracked by the frost. Dominique landed on a small shelf and led the way upward.

"The fur!" he cried when half-way to the top.

Jimmie Lad scrambled up beside him and saw a huge crevice, open on one side but closed at the top. Piled high at the back were the bales of fur. Each was sewed in its burlap wrapping and marked with the year, "HB" and the number of the post, in the manner in which every "piece" of fur or goods transported by the company's brigades is ticketed.

Dominique turned exultantly to Jimmie Lad.

"We save that for the company!" he cried. "The fur she safe."

And then he added fiercely:

"We beat McKerral yet. We beat him. He lose like every one who cheats the company."

Jimmie did not speak. Until then he had refused, despite all the evidence, to believe his idol could be guilty of such treachery.

He had let Dominique talk, had even seemed to agree with him, because he wanted all the information he could get. But even now, when confronted with the results of the manager's activities, he found his heart refusing to accept what his mind compelled.

"We take it back to the store?" asked Dominique. "Maybe we can get that smallest York boat in the water."

After his first outburst against McKerral the old man had become again the servant of the company, and his question was merely a request for orders. At first Jimmie did not understand, for in the excitement of the morning he had forgotten having told Dominique that he had been sent on from the district office; that he was a servant of the Hudson's Bay Company.

He knew he was an imposter, a usurper, but, because his intentions were honest and the romantic desire to serve the great corporation of his dreams was so great, he decided to continue in the rôle.

"It is dry here, and it is safe," he said. "It would take us some time to move it. I think the thing for us to do is to guard it here. One man can stand off McKerral and any number he may have with him. At the post it couldn't be done. Come back with me, Dominique, and get a rifle and plenty of ammunition and grub. Then you come here and watch the fur day and night. I'll start tomorrow morning for the district office or as far as is necessary to find some one to take word there. It may mean a month, but you can do it, can't you?"

"Me stay a year," was the grim answer. "That best plan. We need more Hudson's Bay men in here. We got to save the fur and next Winter's, too. If those hunters stay away, where all the business next year?"

Jimmie Lad saw the significance of the remark instantly. Not only were the results of the past year's business endangered, but the future business of a prosperous post might be ruined for several seasons unless the hunters were rounded up and convinced that the evil spirits had not returned to take possession of Spirit Lake. Something more than the ninety-two pieces of fur in the cave was at stake; quite unconsciously he assumed the responsibility.

At the post Dominique filled his canoe with supplies and returned to the island as quickly as possible.

"McKerral or no one else ever get that fur," he said as Jimmie offered his hand in parting. "You bring the help in. I be here when you get back."

It was an hour before sunset when the old man paddled away, or Jimmie would have started at once. He decided to attend to all the necessary preparations and after a good night's sleep make an early start in the morning. He gathered what food he would need, cooked his supper and then went out on to the veranda for a smoke.

Ever since the discovery of the fur hidden on the island, Jimmie Lad had been oppressed by the conclusiveness of the evidence that McKerral had betrayed and robbed the company. The array of facts compelled belief, yet his old-time faith and trust drove him to search for some thing that might explain away the suspicions.

For the first time since his arrival at the post, he thought of the office with its files of correspondence, its ledgers, fur-books and post diary. There might be something in them that would clear McKerral, would restore his old idol. He arose and went at once into the living-room, part of which was devoted to an office.

Scattered about on the desk were a number of letters. Most of them bore the familiar heading of the Hudson's Bay Company, but what first attracted Jimmie Lad's attention was a blue-typed letterhead of a St. Louis fur concern. He picked it up and read:

> Mr. Alan McKerral,
> Dear Sir:
>
> We are glad to have your letter of March second and to know that all arrangements are complete. The scheme outlined by you, especially that part relating to the means of getting rid of the Indians at the right moment, is excellent. We know you can not fail, and you may be assured that we will not fail in our part. Eight men are already on their way, and we have made complete arrangements for getting the fur across Lake Superior in such a manner that it can not be traced.
>
> We will not communicate with you again by letter as our men should be in your vicinity by the time another letter could reach you. Their leader will have full instructions.

CHAPTER IV

THE NIGHT VISITORS

THERE was nothing left upon which Jimmie Lad could hang a shred of faith. The letter was as damning as a confession. Until then the evidence had been circumstantial. Now it was conclusive. His idol was shattered. McKerral was a traitor and a thief.

Jimmie Lad had gone to a window to read the letter, because it was becoming dark in the room. He did not light a lamp and search further through the correspondence. His first discovery had been enough, and he sat down beside the open window and looked out over the lake.

With McKerral convicted of treachery, the great fur-trading corporation itself began to lose its romantic glamour. He saw that he had built up his own conception of the Hudson's Bay Company; that he had clothed it with the weavings of his own imagination. Now that the reality was so far different, now that he knew men were not loyal to all that the company had stood for in his own dreams, he was a complete victim of his disillusionment.

For an hour he sat there as one of those rare, peaceful Northern nights descended. Even the dim outlines of the old, whitewashed log buildings, the clear Northern stars, the faint breeze from off the lake, all the alluring, imagination-arousing details of his surroundings, failed to bring back the fascination of fur land.

In the face of the revelation of McKerral's activities, even his own course of action was no longer clear. While there had been doubt, he could carry out his first plans. Now that McKerral was convicted beyond question, he could no longer gain any joy in serving the great company if it meant only to expose the disgrace of his father's friend.

Then the thought of Dominique, papiently guarding the fur on the lonely island, came to him. If this man could be true to his trust, he at least owed the old fellow the fulfilment of the responsibility he had assumed. He determined to start in the morning for the railroad and telegraph the district office that the post was deserted. Duty demanded that much.

A faint but sharp and unmistakable sound aroused him. His head went up, and he looked toward the lake, for he had heard the click of a paddle against the gunwale of a Peterborough.

Jimmie Lad's first thought was that some one had come from the headquarters of the district; that the moccasin telegraph had carried out the story and a new manager had been sent to the deserted post. He arose and ran out to the front door. As he stood there, his hand on the latch, it occurred to him that there had been no other sound, no bumping of a canoe against the dock, no murmur of voices. He waited, but there were no shadowy figures crossing the clearing between him and the lake.

With the knowledge that some one was approaching the post furtively, Jimmie Lad forgot his shattered dreams. He slipped back into the living-room and picked up his rifle. Then he went on through to the kitchen, out the back door and around to the corner, where he watched and listened.

Five minutes passed, and there was no sound, no sign of any one. He crawled on his hands and knees to the rear of the store and watched from the other side. Another five minutes, and he began to doubt that he had heard a paddle clicking against a gunwale. He became restless, was about to turn back to the dwelling-house, when he heard a muttered exclamation from directly overhead.

Jimmie dropped flat in the grass and looked up. From a window in the gable end of the store there came a faint yellow light which flickered for a moment and then went out as does a match. He heard voices again and then the creak of a board on the floor of the store loft, the fur room.

He remembered that, in their excitement following the discovery of the loss of the fur, he and Dominique had forgotten to lock the front door. Instantly he divined that these were the men mentioned in the letter from St. Louis and that they had come for the fur. Their silent approach to the post was explained, and Jimmie Lad saw, too, the possibility that they were seeking to leave McKerral without the proceeds of his treachery; that they were endeavoring to get the ninety-two bales without the knowledge of the manager.

Jimmie Lad did not hesitate. When he heard the stairs creak as the two men started to descend, he ran around the corner of the building to the front, where he could command the door, the only entrance. In the darkness and in his haste he went close to a drying-reel upon which a fish-net had been wound. The button in the sleeve on his left arm caught in a mesh of the net and jerked him back. The reel turned on its crude wooden bearings and a shrill, grating shriek shattered the silence. Jimmie Lad disentangled himself and ran on.

As he looked around the corner of the

store, he began to wish he had not been so reckless. He had no cover except the building in which the men were hiding. They would be watching for him. There might be others still at the lake or among the servants' cabins. There was only the faint light of the stars, but against the white building he could be seen easily.

He dropped flat in the grass and kept a sharp watch in every direction. He heard nothing, not even in the store, and saw the possibilities of a night-long seige. His present position would never do in such an event, and he began to plan a retreat to the dwelling-house. As he arose to his hands and knees, he felt, rather than heard, a faint thud at the rear of the store. It was followed quickly by another.

The significance of the sounds did not strike Jimmie for a full minute. Then he knew what they meant; knew that two men had dropped from the window in the gable end at the rear of the store.

He did not stir, knowing that any movement would betray his position. The minutes passed, and then the silence was broken by a sharp clatter at the dock.

He crawled toward the shore, still watching behind him, and, when he reached the lake, he saw the dim shadow of a canoe speeding straight out toward the center. The fur thieves had fled, had been frightened away.

The excitement, the threatened danger to the post, the knowledge that the men from the St. Louis company were in the vicinity—all served to dispel Jimmie Lad's gloomy thoughts of an hour before. He saw the danger that threatened Dominique should he and the fur be discovered, and he saw the necessity of haste if the district office were to be warned in time. There was nothing of value in the post itself, now that the fur had been removed, and there was no necessity of guarding it further.

Jimmie determined to start at once, but, after he had loaded his canoe, he remembered Dominique on the island. The old man should be warned of the presence of the fur thieves and of the facts learned from the St. Louis letter. He must be prepared to guard the island from the attacks of several men—eight the letter had stated, though Jimmie Lad believed there had been only two in the party which had just fled.

Keeping close to the shore, Jimmie Lad paddled south until he had rounded the point and could see the island. He crossed straight toward it, and, when a couple of hundred yards away, whistled softly. There was an answering whistle, and he paddled forward to find Dominique waiting on the ledge of rock.

"The sons of a gun!" was his exclamation when Jimmie Lad had told of the raid on the store and of the letter. "McKerral he cheat them, too. He going to keep the fur for himself. But they no get it. You hurry out."

"And don't take chances," counseled Jimmie Lad as he shoved off. "Keep hidden, and they may never suspect you are here. Then, if they do come, you can surprize them and drive them off easily."

"You no worry about the fur," was the confident reply. "It be here when you come again."

JIMMIE LAD went back past the post and on northward toward the mouth of the river. He intended to travel as far as the first portage, which he expected to reach at daybreak, take a few hours rest there and then go on. Two hours steady paddling, and he reached the river and turned up against the current. Another hour brought the end of the short Northern night, and in the early dawn he landed at the portage. He felt so fresh he decided not to rest and, his canoe upon his shoulders, started across.

Jimmie had not thought of the possibility of meeting any one until he had gone far up the river. The portage trail was rocky and steep with thick brush on either side, and the canoe hid his vision. As a result he found himself within twenty feet of a small tent near the river at the upper end of the portage before he had discovered its presence.

He stood there motionless, the canoe still on his shoulders.

"I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed. "That's my tent!"

Jimmie Lad did not mean that it was the tent he had brought North with him. That was in a pack at the other end of the portage. But in the enthusiasm for wilderness journeys and wilderness equipment, he had designed and ordered tents of several patterns. The year before it had been the light, green affair now pitched before him, a tent which he had forgotten in his enthusiasm for a new type.

That it was his tent, there could be no mistake. On the flap, now closed, was a figure he had copied with a charred stick from some Indian rock paintings near which he was camped with Tom Gill. He had left the tent in Chicago, and here it was within three hundred miles of Hudson Bay.

Before Jimmie Lad had recovered from his amazement, the flap was lifted suddenly.

"Father!" was his astonished exclamation. "What on earth are you doing here?"

The flap was pushed back farther, and Jimmie Dunn's head appeared beside that of Marshall Wells.

"McKerral send you back?" was the father's greeting.

"Sent me back! No; he wasn't there."

"It's all right, then," said Jimmie Dunn as he crawled out and stood erect. "You're here, and we're here, and we're in time, and nothing's happened."

"But what are you two doing here?" demanded Jimmie Lad as he lowered his canoe to the ground.

"Didn't McKerral tell you?" asked his father.

"I haven't seen McKerral. He wasn't at the post."

"But he left a message telling you that he didn't want you there this Summer?"

"There wasn't any message, and McKerral wasn't there," answered Jimmie Lad solemnly. "McKerral has driven all the hunters away from Spirit Lake, and all the servants, and he has stolen all the fur taken in last year, seventy-five thousand dollars worth, and the treaty money."

"Alan McKerral!" cried Jimmie Dunn. "Stolen the fur! You're crazy, boy! What kind of an Indian tale is this?"

"All I know," answered Jimmie Lad doggedly, "is that the fur and the money are gone, and McKerral is gone, and he took it away from the store. And I found a letter from a St. Louis fur company making an arrangement to get the fur across Lake Superior. Last night two men came for it, only they didn't get it because Dominique is guarding it until I can get help from the district office."

Both his father and Jimmie Dunn stared helplessly at the young man during his recital of these facts. Marshall Wells was the first to recover from the astounding indictment of his old friend.

"Jimmie Lad," he began sternly, "I am surprized that you should listen to such nonsense about Alan McKerral. A more honorable man never lived. There is some excuse for the way you have jumped to this conclusion in the fact that you don't understand the wild rumors that will circulate among the Indians when anything out of the ordinary has happened.

"Apparently something peculiar has happened at the post. Alan sensed it in the Spring and sent out a letter to me in which he asked that we keep you in Chicago until we heard from him again. He said it wasn't any of the usual opposition work but something different and that he expected trouble. He made it so strong that, when the letter arrived a week after you left, we started at once. We didn't know what you might run into or where your—your enthusiasm might lead you. Now tell us what makes you believe Alan is a traitor to the Hudson's Bay Company."

"He sent word that I wasn't to come?" asked Jimmie Lad. "Of course he did. Just another piece of evidence. He didn't want me or any one else around when he pulled off this robbery."

"Stop that, boy!" commanded Jimmie Dunn.

"At once," added Marshall Wells. "I won't listen to any such charges against Alan McKerral until I have absolute proof. Now tell us what you know."

Jimmie Lad began at the beginning, telling everything that had happened since his guide had left him and he had arrived at Spirit Lake Post to find it deserted. He made no attempt to prove his charges against Alan McKerral, being content to let his story bring the conclusions he himself had reached.

"There you are," he concluded. "That's all I know, and the finishing touch has been added by McKerral's letter to you in which he tried to head me off. Of course, he didn't want me here this Summer."

"That's not proof," said his father sternly. "In the face of what has happened, he would not want you here if there were to be any danger."

"But why, if he could get a letter out to you, didn't he get one out to the district office and tell them what was going on?" demanded Jimmie Lad. "If things were as you say, he would have sent for help when he had the chance."

"Not Alan McKerral," declared Jimmie

Dunn. "He is not the sort that asks for help. And I'll tell you another thing, boy. Alan McKerral didn't steal that fur, and he isn't the pawn of any thieving fur company in the States. I'd as quickly call your father a thief as Alan."

"Alan couldn't do such a thing," added Marshall Wells, "and we're going right on to Spirit Lake and get him out of his trouble."

"You had better turn around and let the company know what has happened as quick as you can," was Jimmie Lad's rather confident suggestion.

"Not for a minute," announced Jimmie Dunn. "Alan is in trouble, and Alan has always handled his own post without outside help. But he needs help now, and we're going to give it to him. And don't refer again to any suspicions you may have. It's sheer nonsense, and your father and I are going to prove it to you."

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST PRISONER

"I HOPE you can," answered Jimmie Lad. "I didn't want to believe it. But I had to, and I think you are going to. I can't see how you will be able to explain away that letter and his taking the fur and Duncan McFarlan's murder and his own desertion of the post."

"That letter was planted," declared Jimmie Dunn emphatically. "The only thing I'm afraid of is that Alan is dead. Nothing would make him desert his post. And, if he is dead, we must clear him of any suspicion. We'll watch that fur and find out who is after it, and then we'll make him come through with the facts or wring his neck."

The pleasure which the three always gained from their woods companionship was sufficient to overcome any feeling which might have arisen from their initial disagreement as to the guilt of Alan McKerral. The two older men, as always, assumed that Jimmie Lad was only a boy. They had never realized that he had grown up, while his own respect for them precluded even a secret resentment because of this attitude. As they cooked breakfast together, the young man found himself glad that they had come.

The talk never strayed far from Alan McKerral, and, as the two recounted instance after instance of his courage, resourcefulness and devotion to the Hudson's Bay Company, Jimmie Lad began to realize what the destruction of their faith in the post-manager would mean to them.

To him it had been hard, for the toppling of youthful idols always brings pain. But to them it would mean the breaking down of a friendship that had been kept warm by memories that few men can have.

Jimmie's own disillusionment had been so bitter he could not derive any faith from their own trust. But he welcomed it because it permitted him to continue in a situation which had been hopeless. At least the decision as to whether he should go on to prove McKerral's guilt had been taken out of his hands. In the face of the older men's determination to aid their friend, no other action was possible. He resolved to put his own thoughts and conclusions aside and join whole-heartedly in whatever plans his father and foster-uncle might make.

Marshall Wells and Jimmie Dunn had scorned a guide, and, though fresh from the city, they had made the journey in several days less time than had Jimmie Lad with the leisurely family of the half-breed. They had punished themselves severely, because they had felt an undertone in McKerral's letter which revealed something more sinister than the brief words indicated. But, when they started on down-stream, they did not slacken the pace maintained for nearly three hundred miles. Jimmie Lad, alone in his canoe, had great difficulty in keeping up with them.

From the mouth of the river they kept close to the lake shore and hidden from the post. When they approached the clearing early in the forenoon, they landed behind a point and went forward in the shelter of the spruce until they could see the buildings. For half an hour they waited, watching the land and the lake. When they were satisfied that the post was deserted—that the fur thieves had not returned—they paddled openly to the little dock and went into the dwelling-house.

Jimmie Lad failed to find signs of any one having been there since he had left in the night, and, upon his reporting this, his father immediately called a council, designating the kitchen as the place so that they could cook and talk at the same time.

"You say you found this letter from the St. Louis company among the correspondence on the office desk," Marshall Wells began. "You must have found something else there."

"I didn't look any farther," answered Jimmie Lad. "I thought there might be something in the books or files that would give a hint as to what had happened and started to look. That letter was lying near the top, with the heading sticking out, and it attracted my attention. I read it, and I thought it was enough."

"How about the post diary?" asked Jimmie Dunn. "That would tell something. I'll get it."

He went into the living-room and in a few minutes rushed back joyfully, a worn old ledger in his hands.

"Alan always was particular about writing down something every day," he said as he opened the book. "Many of the new men don't do it at all, but the old-timers are as careful of the daily record as of everything else. Now we'll know the entire history of this affair up to the time Alan left the post."

He sat down and turned the leaves.

"Two years ago. Here's last year. Now we'll get it. Here's April."

He turned another page and stared at the book in silence.

"Read it aloud," said Marshall Wells, who was helping his son at the cook-stove.

"What was the date of that letter from Alan telling you not to send Jimmie Lad?" asked Jimmie Dunn.

"April second."

"And April third is the date of the last entry, and he says nothing about any trouble."

"April third!" exclaimed Marshall. "And he says nothing more?"

"Not another word."

They were silent for a moment, and then Jimmie Dunn continued optimistically:

"But that doesn't mean anything. Alan is a close old clam, and he's careful. He sensed something wrong and, because he couldn't get at the bottom of it, he didn't write anything. He was waiting until he cleared it up."

"Then we're here without a clue, without an idea of what we should do to help him, even to learn if he is still alive," said Marshall.

"I don't see what we can do," admitted Jimmie Dunn. "We don't know which way to turn. Can't old Dominique give us an idea? We can talk to him, anyhow."

"Look here," broke in Jimmie Lad. "How about the two men who came to the post last night? They believed the post was deserted, because, when I struck the fish-reel accidentally, they ran. They can't be far away, and the chances are they never saw me and that they'll come again. We'll keep hidden, and, when some one does come, we'll see that he doesn't get away. When we do catch them, we'll do like Uncle Jimmie said and wring their necks if they don't tell what's been happening around here."

"That's it!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn excitedly. "They may be back tonight. We'll keep the place dark and scatter around and wait. What do you think, Marsh?"

"It's the only thing we can do today at least. We're all pretty tired and can sleep this afternoon, taking turns to keep watch. Then tomorrow morning we'll see Dominique and decide what else to do."

They ate their meal and went at once to bed, Jimmie Lad standing the first watch of two hours and then sleeping four. At seven o'clock his father called him to a cold supper, for they did not wish to risk the smoke of a fire again. They talked as they ate, the two older men making conjectures as to the possible fate of Alan McKerral.

"We'll get hold of one or two of these prowlers and then we'll know," said Jimmie Dunn as he arose from the table. "How will we split up tonight? It will be dark in two or three hours."

They discussed their plans while Jimmie Lad washed the dishes. Because the store would be the object of attack, they centered their arrangements around it, and at half-past nine, when twilight had come, they took their rifles and started out through the kitchen door. As they walked toward the rear of the store, they heard a rifle-shot.

"That's Dominique!" whispered Jimmie Lad excitedly. "They've found him and are trying to get the fur."

He started at once for the dock, his father and Jimmie Dunn following, and he had a canoe in the water when they caught him.

"I'll take the stern," he said. "I know where the island is. We'll have to hurry. It's a mile down there."

Jimmie kept close to the shore after passing the clearing, knowing that their approach could not be seen in the deep shadow of the forest. There was a slight wind against them, but the canoe fairly leaped from the water with each stroke. And, ten minutes after leaving the dock, they crept around the point and saw the dim outline of an island before them.

AS THEY waited a moment, listening for something to tell what had happened, Jimmie Lad, though he was behind the others, saw something floating toward them.

"What's that on the water?" he whispered in his father's ear.

The object came toward them slowly, and at last they could distinguish the outline of a canoe.

"It's empty," whispered Jimmie Dunn from the bow. "The wind is carrying it toward us."

Jimmie Lad shoved against the shore with his paddle, and their craft sprang out to meet the other.

"Empty," repeated Jimmie Dunn as he caught the gunwale. "No! There's some one in it! Here! Get up! By George! It's a dead man!"

They pulled the two canoes together and looked into the bottom of the strange craft. Lying with his head under one thwart and his feet hanging over another was the body of a man.

"Is this Dominique?" asked Marshall.

"No," his son replied as he leaned over. "This is a young man, and he's a white man, too. Feel of him. He's just been killed. One of those shots got him. He's probably one of the two who were at the post last night."

"Can't learn anything from him," was Jimmie Dunn's disappointed comment.

"Might as well paddle on over to the island and find out what has happened," suggested Marshall Wells. "If Dominique accounted for this one—and they would have had to go to the island together in this canoe—the chances are he got the other one. There were two shots, and there is water in this canoe. The other one probably tumbled out when he was hit and nearly tipped it over."

They beached the canoe with the body of the dead man in it and then paddled quietly out toward the island, Jimmie Lad laying a course that would bring them out in front of Dominique's hiding-place. When one hundred yards away, he whistled softly as he had the night before.

Instantly there was an answering whistle, and they paddled to the island.

"Dominique," Jimmie Lad called softly when they were one hundred feet away.

"Here," came the answer immediately. "Who is it?"

"It's Wells. I met help on the river this morning, and we were at the post when we heard you shoot. Where is the other one?"

"He right here, tied to this tree," was the answer. "He jump out of the canoe when it close, and I make him come ashore or get shot."

They shoved the canoe forward and landed at the ledge beside Dominique. The old man led the way upward to a level spot beneath the cave and stopped before a tree to which he had tied his prisoner.

"The sons of a gun!" he said grimly. "They see you come down here last night and today they watch from the shore. When it get dark, they come and try to get the fur. But I tell you it be here when you get back."

Jimmie Dunn and Marshall Wells had pressed forward to look at the prisoner.

"An Indian," Marshall announced. "It'll be harder to make him talk, but we will. Now we can learn something."

They gathered in a half-circle before the man, and Marshall and Jimmie Dunn began at once to ask questions.

"Where is McKerral? How many of you are there? What are you after, the fur? Didn't you know that you can't come in here and rob the Hudson's Bay Company and get away with it?"

The man did not answer.

"Don't you see?" broke in Jimmie Lad. "He can't understand English."

They tried him in Ojibway, with Dominique's help, and then in Cree. Jimmie Dunn spoke to him in Chippewyan, and Marshall Wells in the language of the Slaves. But the man did not appear to understand a word.

"Me never see Indian like him before," Dominique offered. "He come from long way off."

They could not see the man plainly in the darkness; could not determine whether he were shamming or really failed to understand.

"Let's take him back to the post," suggested Jimmie Dunn. "We can have a light there, and we can do something to make him tell."

Dominique was left to guard the fur, while the other three, after tying the prisoner's hands behind him, loaded him into the canoe and paddled away.

"How about it?" asked Jimmie Lad as they drew up at the dock. "If we go into the dwelling-house or store, a light will show. There might be some one else around."

"There are curtains in the dwelling-house," said his father.

"But some light would get through," answered Jimmie. "Why not take him into the warehouse? It hasn't any windows."

The older men agreed, and, while Jimmie went for a lamp, the others led their prisoner to the warehouse. When the door had been closed and the lamp lighted, they found that he was evidently a full-blooded Indian. He was perfectly cool and unafraid and returned their examination with equal interest.

Again they tried him with Ojibway, Cree, Chippewyan, Beaver, Slave—all the languages which Jimmie Dunn and Marshall Wells had picked up in their twelve years in the Barren Grounds and the forests south of them. Not once did the man indicate in any way that he understood. For an hour they made every effort, but without success.

"Remember that post-manager at Fort Smith the trip when we went to the mouth of the Coppermine?" asked Jimmie Dunn. "He had been in Labrador, and we were talking about Indian languages, and he told us some Naskapi words. I've forgotten them."

"I remember one or two, though I've forgotten the translations," said Marshall Wells.

He turned and said something to the Indian, whose face lighted instantly. He began an unintelligible jabber but stopped when he saw that the white men did not understand him.

"He'd talk if he could!" cried Jimmie Dunn. "Why didn't we take that Labrador trip we always talked of, Marsh? If we had, we could have learned Naskapi, and we could find out all about this."

"There is a way yet," answered Marshall. "We know now that he would talk if he could. We can work some sort of signs and——"

"Have him draw a map showing where McKerral is," interrupted his son.

"Jimmie Lad, you're a wonder!" cried Jimmie Dunn. "Run over to the dwelling-house and get some paper and a pencil. Bring your map of this country, too."

TO THEIR surprize they had no difficulty in making the Indian understand what they meant, and, what was more surprizing, he did not hesitate upon the suggestion that he draw a map.

"He's willing to give the others away if there is a chance for himself!" cried Jimmie Dunn. "We'll find old Alan yet."

The Indian's hands were untied. In their eagerness to get the map the three white men became careless in guarding him. The door stood unlocked behind them, and, as they crowded around the bench beside which the Naskapi stood, they left the way to freedom open. The prisoner glanced over his shoulder and saw what they had done. Then he turned, took the pencil and began to trace an outline of Spirit Lake.

The map grew steadily, but always off to the south. The end of the big lake was shown, and then a large river which gave uninterrupted passage for canoes straight on into the south.

"That's like the Government map," commented Jimmie Lad, who had been comparing the two. "That big river, the Sturgeon, is shown. Wonder why he is so willing to give us the right dope? We left things wide open a minute ago, and he could have bolted out through the door and gotten clean away."

"He's leaving the river, not following it," interrupted his father. "See! He's cutting straight east into a blank space on the Government map. There it is!"

The Naskapi had made a cross on the north side of a small lake which was reached by means of a river, and, as he laid down the pencil, he set his finger on the cross, nodded his head and said something that sounded very much like McKerral.

"That's where Alan is, and it's probably the headquarters of this gang of fur thieves!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn. "Let's tie this fellow up and get some sleep, and then early in the morning we will start."

"We need a chain for that," said Marshall Wells. "Jimmie Lad, run over to the store and see what you can find. Traps are all right—and bring a padlock if there is one."

"What do you think of this, Jimmie?" he asked when his son had disappeared in the darkness. "This fellow means that Alan is there where he placed the cross. But why doesn't he come back to the post? I can't understand that."

"You are not thinking for a moment that Alan is in with this gang?" demanded Jimmie Dunn angrily. "You don't suspect that things are as old Dominique says?"

"Of course not, but I don't know what to think of this. I never heard of anything like it before. I never knew of a post being raided; of a gang of thieves planning to get the fur. It was done in the old days of the Northwest Company, but that's a hundred years ago. The opposition still fights for fur, but they don't steal it."

"Whatever it is, you can rest assured that Alan is acting on the square," retorted Jimmie Dunn. "I think he is being held prisoner by this outfit. Anyhow, we'll know before this time tomorrow night."

Both whirled toward the door as they heard the sound of flying feet. Before they could take a step toward it, Jimmie Lad had slipped in.

"Put out the light, quick!" he whispered. "There are three big canoes coming up to the dock from the south. There's going to be another raid on the post."

CHAPTER VI

THE FUR RAIDERS

"WAIT!" commanded Marshall as his son started toward the light. "We must get our rifles."

"They're here—where we put them," said Jimmie Dunn.

All three sprang toward their weapons. The Naskapi, though he had not understood a word, had been watching their faces, especially Jimmie Lad's. When the white men started toward their rifles, crowding together in their haste, he divined the reason. In the same instant he leaped to the door, opened it and was gone.

Jimmie Lad was right at his heels, but he did not dare call out or shoot. He could only watch the Indian disappear in the darkness, running straight across the clearing toward the spruce forest. His father and Jimmie Dunn joined him.

"What do you make of that?" demanded the young man in a whisper. "He's running away! Seems a lot more afraid of his gang than he was of us."

"Maybe these are Hudson's Bay men coming," suggested his father.

"But they wouldn't come from the south. They'd come from the mouth of the river to the north. These canoes are from the place the Indian marked with a cross."

The clatter of a paddle dropped into a canoe ended the discussion.

"They're landing," whispered Jimmie Dunn. "Come on. We'll circle around to the south of the dwelling-house, where we can guard the door of the store and watch them come up from the lake."

Crouching and running swiftly, they crossed over behind the post buildings and around to the south of the dwelling-house. As they looked around the corner, they saw the shadowy outlines of six men walking from the lake to the store, single file.

"Do you think Alan can be with them?" asked Marshall.

"Of course not. This is the real attack for the fur."

"But it may be Hudson's Bay men coming in by another route."

"We won't take chances on shooting until we know," said Jimmie Dunn. "We'll see what they're up to in a minute. They act as if they believe the post is deserted. Look! They're going to break into the store!"

The six men had gathered in a group at the door. Jimmie Lad had left it unlocked when he went after a chain, and there was a murmur of surprize when the strangers found they they would not have to break it in. Half of them entered, leaving the others outside.

"They're after the fur, all right," whispered Marshall. "In a moment they will know it isn't there. That one fact ought to clear Alan. He knew what was coming, and he hid it."

"We ought to act while they are separated," suggested Jimmie Dunn. "If we can catch one who talks English, we can get track of Alan."

"All right," answered Marshall. "Three of them are inside the store, and three are at the door. I'm going to hail them, and, if they're not Hudson's Bay men, we'll open upon the three outside."

He looked around the corner of the dwelling-house and called:

"Alan! Oh, Alan! Are you there?"

No answer came.

"Hudson's Bay!" called Marshall. "Is that you, Hudson's Bay?"

The three men inside the store ran out, and a volley shattered the windows of the dwelling-house.

"They think we're inside," whispered Jimmie Lad. "Duck back to the rear."

He turned and ran around the building, the older men at his heels. They looked past the corner just in time to see another volley poured into the windows of the living-room.

Silence followed. There had been no return fire, and the raiders began to edge around the corner slowly, their rifles ready for quick shots at the windows. When four of them were silhouetted against the white wall of the store, Marshall Wells lifted his rifle. The other two did the same, and their weapons rang out almost together. Each fired a second time, and then they ducked back around the corner, just as two shots came their way. Jimmie Dunn, who was the last, stumbled and fell.

"Jimmie!" cried Marshall Wells. "Bad?"

The figure on the ground did not answer, but it did lift up, turn and crawl back to the corner, where the wounded man emptied his rifle as fast as he could pump the lever.

Jimmie Lad and his father sprang after and past him, coming around the corner face to face with three men. These broke and ran without a shot, one falling and the other two continuing on to the lake.

"Where were you hit, Jimmie?" demanded Marshall Wells as he returned to his friend while his son continued the pursuit.

"In the leg, the left. Don't think it hit the bone."

"Clear through?"

"I guess so. It'll just lay me up, is all. Go on and get the rest of them."

As Marshall sprang up to follow his son, he heard the clatter of canoes at the dock and more shooting. He ran on to find Jimmie Lad behind a pile of firewood, firing steadily at a fleeing shadow on the water.

"They've gone, dad, what there is left of them," said the young man. "How's Uncle Jimmie?"

"Hole through his leg above the knee. Sure they all left? All who could? We don't want a shot in the back."

"Four of them got into that canoe, and I think I winged one as they pushed off. There must be two back at the store."

They circled around through the clearing to the rear of the buildings and up to where they had left Jimmie Dunn. He was gone.

"Oh, Jim," called Marshall softly.

"Come on over here," came the answer from the corner of the store.

"All right?" asked Marshall quickly.

"Sure. We got one, and another is about all in. I heard him talking and crawled over. If he only becomes rational before he dies, we can get something out of him. He's a white man."

* * *

JIMMIE WELLS and his father had rushed over to the store, and they found Jimmie Dunn sitting beside a body that lay, face down, on the ground.

"We must take care of you first," declared Marshall. "Come, lad. Help me carry him into the dwelling-house."

The wounded man protested, but they bore him into the living-room and lighted a lamp.

"Never mind me," protested Jimmie Dunn as they began to cut away the leg of his trousers, preparatory to examining the wound. "I'm all right, and the thing now is to get after that fellow before he dies. It may mean Alan's life."

"Good boy," said Marshall. "You're right, as usual. We'll make you comfortable and come back later."

They carried him into McKerral's room and laid him on the bed.

"Now for the other one," said Marshall. "Get a light."

Jimmie Lad ran into the kitchen and returned with a lantern, with which he led the way to the store.

The wounded raider lay where they had left him, and, as the light was held near his face, they believed he was dead. Marshall felt of his pulse and then turned the body over on to its back.

"He's still alive," he said. "See! Shot through the body. Twice. Must have been that first volley we gave them. White man, all right. Scotchman or an Englishman, I should say, and a big fellow. I doubt if we should move him. Might kill him. He's lost lots of blood."

The wounded man suddenly opened his eyes and stared at the two faces above his.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Hudson's Bay men, and who are you?" demanded Jimmie Lad quickly.

"Never mind who I am," was the quick retort. "Am I badly hit?"

"You are, and I don't think you have a chance," said Marshall.

"Won't get up again?"

"I don't see how. It's a body wound."

Marshall held the light closer and felt of the man's chest.

"Two holes," he announced. "One through each lung."

"It's strange that I don't feel a thing, no pain," whispered the wounded man.

"One bullet probably nicked the spinal column," Marshall suggested. "It paralyzed you."

The fur thief did not speak again, and his eyes closed.

"Where is Alan McKerral?" asked Marshall.

"How should I know where he is?"

"He has disappeared, and you do know."

The wounded man did not reply.

"We captured one of your men earlier tonight, and we have a map showing the location of your headquarters," Marshall continued. "Here it is. Can you see it? We are going there in the morning. You can't live. Why not be a man and tell us where Alan is?"

"—— McKerral!" cried the fur raider fiercely. "It's McKerral who is responsible for this whole thing. I wish I had him here just for a few seconds. He'd follow me wherever I'm going—and he will soon enough, anyhow, when the others get back."

"Then Alan is still alive?" demanded Marshall.

"Alive, —— him, yes! Too much so. He's a dirty, lying, two-faced cur if ever one lived. He— Won't I get well? Won't I ever get a chance at him?"

The demand came in a whisper, and both Jimmie Lad and his father saw that the man's anger alone was keeping him alive. His face was pasty white, and Jimmie found that his shoepacks were being soaked in a stream of blood that ran out from beneath the man's back.

"If you have anything to say, you had better say it quickly," said Marshall Wells sternly, for the accusation against his old friend had brought quick resentment. "And, if there is anything you can say that will serve to right the wrong of which you have been guilty tonight, say it now."

"My wrong!" cried the man. "What's my wrong beside that of McKerral's? I may have been a thief, for I suppose a man is a thief even if he plays for big stakes. But I played square with my men and with those who were with me. I didn't trick them, of what they had worked hard for."

He rested a moment, for the outburst had severely taxed his strength. When he continued, it was in a whisper.

"McKerral planned all this—the frightening away of the Indians and servants to leave a clear field and then the theft of the fur. Tonight was to have been the time. But he got two of his men to sneak away and get here first.

"It's one of them you caught. But you are too late. They took all the fur and got away with it. There isn't a pelt upstairs. I was there—and I know. McKerral fooled you, and he fooled us. He got us to take all the chances, do all the work, and then he stepped in and got the fur."

"You're wrong there," interrupted Jimmie Lad. "Those other two men never even saw the fur. The loft was empty when they came."

"It was?" demanded the wounded man. "You mean there never was any fur there?"

"There hasn't been a pelt for a week."

Blood bubbled and foamed from the wounded man's mouth. His eyes blazed with a hatred that was terrible to see, and only his angry spirit kept him alive.

"—— McKerral!" he cried. "He even double-crossed the other two!"

His body writhed and twisted; blood gushed from his mouth—and he was dead.

"The contemptible, yellow cur!" whispered Marshall Wells fiercely. "To speak like that of Alan McKerral!"

"You mean, father, that you don't believe even now after what he has said?" demanded Jimmie Lad in amazement.

"Believe!" thundered his father. "Believe! I believe only in Alan, not in what any man says of him! I—why, good God, boy! It can't be true!"

CHAPTER VII

THE HEART OF A MAN

JIMMIE LAD went into the store for a blanket, and, after they had covered the body of the dead man, they returned to Jimmie Dunn. Their concern was first for the wound. Examination showed that the bullet had passed through one side of the leg six inches above the knee, leaving a clean hole.

"There are disinfectants and bandages in my kit, Jimmie Lad," said Marshall. "We'll dress this in a moment. You're all right, Jim, but you'll have to stay in bed."

Marshall worked quickly and, as he worked, he told Jimmie Dunn of the dead raider's statement. It had an even greater effect upon him than it had had upon Marshall, and, so great was his anger, he threatened to get out of bed.

"What a cur he must have been to spend his last minute on earth slandering a man like Alan!" he cried. "Since I've been lying here, I've sort of regretted our shooting into that gang. It wasn't exactly our affair, anyhow, but the Hudson's Bay Company's."

"It was Alan's affair," interrupted Marshall.

"Yes, I know, and, now that fellow said what he did, I'm glad we shot. I only hope that it was my rifle that finished him."

Jimmie Lad had been staring incredulously at the two older men. Even his father's outburst when the fur thief died had not shaken his belief in McKerral's treachery. Everything pointed to it. Nothing in any way excused the post-manager. Yet these two men stuck to him with the blind faith of religious zealots.

The young man's face showed his astonishment even when he began to feel the influence of this sublime trust. Jimmie Dunn saw it and exclaimed angrily—

"Lad, you don't believe what that cur said, do you?"

Jimmie Lad did not answer. He did not fear the storm he might arouse. He simply found himself doubting his own ears and eyes. This doubt was misconstrued by Jimmie Dunn.

"Jimmie Lad," he said, "others may have different opinions, but I know that the greatest thing in the world, the strongest, the finest, the one thing unalterable, is the heart of a man. I don't mean the hearts of men. Few of us are men. But in some we find a spirit, a will, something—maybe it is what is called a soul—that is absolutely without a trace of baseness. It is true, clear, sparkling. Lad, it is priceless. You know these men always, the moment you see them. There is something about them that makes them stand apart.

"When your father and I were only a year or two older than you, when we were making our first Barren Ground trip together, we found Alan McKerral in one of the most distant, desolate posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. We went to his post for supplies because we were starving, and we found him and his people starving. The game had disappeared. A disease had wiped out the sleigh dogs. We were so far from help and the Winter was so severe, it was hopeless even to think of sending for assistance.

"Alan was hoarding a small sack of flour and a few pounds of bacon—not for himself, but for the final emergency. Any thieving, yellow-hearted Indian of the scores hanging around the post had as much to eat as he did. He lost in weight; his cheek-bones pushed against the tight skin; his eyes were at the bottoms of deep hollows.

"The Indians lay about, too lazy or too feeble to get enough wood to keep themselves warm. They would not hunt. They said it was useless. There was no game. Yet every morning long before daylight Alan was out. He snared a few rabbits, a few ptarmigan. Once he knocked down a stray caribou. It saved the lives of all of us, though he did not have an ounce more than the filthiest old beggar of a Chippewyan there.

"I have never known such cold as we suffered that Winter. It squeezed the hearts and the nerves out of your father and me. We wanted only to stick close to the fire; to sit there and hope that something would happen. But with Alan McKerral, always smiling, always joking, always hopeful, spending twelve hours or more each day in the open, tramping those blizzard-swept plains, we could not sit still. We went with him, even when we believed it meant death; when we believed that we did not have the strength to come back.

"We could not do anything else. We believed it was useless, for day after day we traveled miles without seeing the track of a living thing. We often asked: 'Why punish ourselves like this? Why not stay near a fire where we might at least be warm when we died?'

"Of course it happened. It could not help but happen after what Alan had done.

We went out with him one morning, but we could not keep up. I think we were as strong physically, but we lacked his supreme quality."

"How about my father when he went down the Dubawnt after you?" demanded Jimmie Lad hotly.

"That was years later, lad, and Alan McKerral never did a finer thing than Marsh did in finding me. But then we were young, up against the real thing for the first time, and we stumbled. When Alan went on ahead, we circled back to the post. At least we thought we did. I don't think we cared. We were simply tired, so tired we wanted to rest, even at the cost of living.

"It was then we found the caribou. Years later we learned that Alan, in his report to his district office, gave us full credit for saving the post and its people. There was never a word about himself.

"In the twelve years your father and I spent in the Barren Grounds, we were fortunate in seeing a great deal of Alan McKerral. What I have told you is only an isolated instance—one of many. You know how he saved your father. If ever there was a land that proves a man, that makes him or leaves him a wreck, it is that fringe along the great white desert. Alan was made there, and nothing can ever happen that will mar him. The same Alan McKerral we knew years ago is manager of this post, and it's up to you and your father to go out and prove that I am right."

Neither Jimmie Lad nor his father had ever heard Jimmie Dunn speak in this manner. Marshall Wells coughed huskily and blinked his eyes, while his son sat staring at the floor.

"I guess," Jimmie Lad said at last, "there must be something in this world you can't see or hear. I was absolutely convinced that McKerral looted this post. I didn't want to believe it, but I had to. For your sakes, if for no other reason, I'd like to see him cleared."

"And talking isn't going to do it," declared his father. "Let's do something that will help. Our next step is——"

"Go find Alan," interrupted Jimmie Dunn.

"Exactly," agreed Marshall, "but there are several things to be done first. These two bodies must be buried. You must be paddled down to the island where Dominique is guarding the fur so that you will have an attendant. In the morning that leg will be so stiff you can't move. When all that's done, Jimmie Lad and I will take the Naskapi's map and start for the place marked with a cross."

MARSHALL and Jimmie Lad went out, and for two hours they were busy digging a shallow grave and burying the bodies. This done, they went down to the dock but failed to find the body of the man Jimmie Lad believed he had shot when the raiders fled in a canoe.

They did find two large freighting canoes, each twenty-two feet long and five wide and capable of carrying enormous loads and riding out heavy storms. In one there was a frying-pan and kettle and a small box of grub. Otherwise the two craft were empty.

Though he had been perfectly aware that an attempt was being made to raid the post, though he had even battled with the fur thieves and two of them were dead, it remained for the empty canoes lying at the dock to bring the full force of events to Marshall Wells.

The wide, tubby, high appearance of the craft would announce their capabilities to any waterman, and to Marshall they brought a vision of the fur being carried southward up swift rivers, across portages and along the lee shores of great lakes.

"What an ambition!" he exclaimed. "The man who planned this must have had the imagination of a genius. Think of it! Stealing all the fur from a Hudson's Bay Company post! It never has been done, not since the days of the old Northwest Company war. That must have been the man, the one who died at the store."

"Maybe that's the very reason it was planned," said Jimmie Lad. "The fact that such a thing would never be suspected would make it possible, though I don't see how they ever hoped to get out so great a quantity of pelts without being caught somewhere."

"Anyhow, they have failed," said his father. "The Hudson's Bay Company is unbeatable, I guess. If its own men don't win for it, luck steps in. But we must get started."

They went back to the dwelling-house and, after making a stretcher of two poles and a blanket, carried Jimmie Dunn down to the lake and laid him in a canoe. They took their packs, some food and rifles, with plenty of reserve ammunition from the store, and, before the early dawn began to show, were on their way to Dominique's island.

"How about leaving the post all alone when the Naskapi Indian is running loose in the bush?" asked Jimmie Lad as they pushed away from the dock.

"There is nothing he can do there," answered his father. "And, the last time we saw him, he seemed only to want to keep out of sight of the others. He knows his little game, whatever it was, is up. Funny thing! I don't suppose the criminal gang ever existed where some of them did not try to double-cross the others and get away with the choice booty."

"Of course," added Jimmie Dunn. "It was the white man Dominique killed who thought of the trick. And he just took the Naskapi along because he needed help in his plan. Probably would have double-crossed him if they had been successful. Wonder what a Naskapi was doing so far from home."

"That's a minor mystery," answered Marshall. "The thing to do is to find Alan first."

"Why are you so confident that Alan is alive?" asked Jimmie Lad. "If everything is as you believe and this gang has done all this work to clear the path for looting the post, what has prevented their killing him? Duncan McFarlan was murdered right here in the clearing."

There was no answer for a moment. Then Jimmie Dunn twisted slightly in the bottom of the canoe and growled irritably:

"Neither did your father have any reason to believe I was alive after I had been gone for two years in the Barren Grounds. But he kept on looking, and he found me."

When they neared the little island, Jimmie Lad whistled and was answered by Dominique. The old man had heard the shooting and had maintained an anxious watch the remainder of the night.

"Lots of shots but nobody come," he said after they had explained what had happened. "Me think sure you all dead."

They carried Jimmie Dunn to a place beside the fur and made him comfortable with a number of blankets brought for the purpose.

"Hadn't we better show Dominique that map?" asked Jimmie Lad when he and his father were ready to leave. "He knows every foot of land and water around here, and he can tell us if it is correct."

"But it is too dark, and we don't dare have a light," answered Marshall. "Those other fur thieves may be near here, and it would tip off the hiding-place."

"I'll fix that," said his son.

He piled several bales of fur in a square and then, with a lantern on the ground inside it, struck a light. Dominique was told of the map and shown the place marked.

"The sons of a gun!" he exclaimed. "That's Little Spirit Lake."

"But is the map correct?" demanded Marshall Wells anxiously.

"It just as good as if I draw it myself. That Little Spirit Lake, all right, and the right way to go there. But it the long way. You got a pencil?"

There was no pencil to be had.

"It easy, anyhow," continued Dominique confidently. "You go up this river like this fellow shows, only you don't go so far. First you see little river on left side; then bigger one. It about here, five miles from this lake. You go up that river until you come to a big lake. It be right in here. Go clear to other end this lake, and then you make a little portage, and you be in Little Spirit Lake right here, about a mile east of where the cross is."

"See, dad!" exclaimed Jimmie Lad. "We take only one side of a triangle instead of the other two sides."

"And there only one little portage," added Dominique. "Other way there dozen portages, and that other river swift. That McKerral he like a fox, all right."

"What do you mean?" asked Jimmie Lad.

"No Indians go near that lake since I been a boy. One time a hunter have his camp there. He good man; get lots of fur. But the Indians think he turn *windigo*. *Weeteego* the Crees call it, you know. He eat up all his family, his woman and three children. Somebody find the bones, but they never find him, and all the hunters think he there yet, waiting to eat anybody who comes along."

"Don't let a lot of old legends delay you," called Jimmie Dunn from outside the square of fur bales.

"This is important," answered Marshall.

"Sure," said Dominique. "McKerral

to this place marked with a cross. That's probably their headquarters—the place where they have supplies. To get out to the railroad, they'll have to paddle three hundred miles, and that will take a bit of grub. They're going straight to Little Spirit Lake to get it.

"But they won't have any idea we're after them. They have kept their headquarters secret, and how should they know we've been told about it? They're going to paddle along at a good ordinary traveling gait, and they're not going to watch their back trail. We've got to put on speed to beat them into Little Spirit Lake, and we shouldn't slow down in the river."

Marshall Wells did not answer. The reasoning was good, and he saw that his son was game to take a chance on the river if it meant winning the race. Jimmie waited a moment for comment, and then he recognized the answer in the increased vigor of his father's paddle-strokes. The canoe leaped ahead, and fifteen minutes later the lake was behind them.

Their pace slowed perceptibly once they were in the grip of the current, a fact which incited them to greater efforts. Marshall Wells in the bow kept a close watch on each bend, and the farther they proceeded the greater became the tension. At last he pulled the bow of the canoe toward the left bank.

"I've found a flaw in your reasoning, lad," he said. "If those four men are confident there is no pursuit because they believe their hiding-place is unknown, why are they in such a hurry? They traveled faster than we did on the lake. They are in a hurry to get to Little Spirit Lake."

"You're right," was the ready answer. "They have some reason for being in a hurry. What do you suppose it is?"

Marshall Wells shook his head.

"Now look here, dad," continued Jimmie Lad. "I don't intend to be disagreeable, but let's go on this supposition. What if that man who died was telling the truth? What if McKerral did double-cross the rest of them? Wouldn't they want to get revenge? Wouldn't they try to get the fur from McKerral? They know it wasn't in the store."

Marshall Wells did not speak, nor did he turn to face his son.

"I tell you, dad," continued Jimmie Lad, "all I want to get at is the truth so that we will know how to act. As a matter of fact, I don't see why we should go tearing off to Little Spirit Lake to find Alan McKerral when we have no good reason to believe he is alive. Maybe the Naskapi meant he is, and maybe he didn't."

"Because I believe he is held prisoner there by others of the gang," answered his father earnestly. "The plans to loot the post were clever as well as daring, which shows there has been a clever leader. And no clever man is going to commit murder if he can help it. McKerral blocked them, and they simply made him prisoner to get him out of the way."

"All right," said Jimmie Lad. "From now on I'm going to accept your version of it and work accordingly. Alan McKerral is a prisoner on the north shore of Little Spirit Lake, and it's up to us to get there before the other canoe does. Otherwise we'd have to fight."

* * *

MARSHALL did not answer but began to paddle, and again they were bucking the current. They passed the first river, which was no more than a creek entering from the east, and in the middle of the forenoon reached the mouth of the second.

"Now we're safe!" exclaimed Jimmie Lad when the big stream was behind them. "We'll go a mile and then have something to eat."

"There is enough bannock and cold boiled pork for a lunch without getting out of the canoe," objected his father.

"And a pot of hot tea and something warm means five miles more in a long day's paddle," retorted Jimmie Lad. "You're worrying too much, dad. We'll get there sooner for a half-hour on shore."

They took it, and Jimmie Lad even insisted upon their lying flat on their backs on the bank and having a smoke before again getting into the canoe. Marshall was about to protest when the significance of Jimmie Lad's remark struck him. He was worrying too much, and it was his son who kept the cooler head.

The tea and hot food had their expected effect for two hours. It gave them new strength for the hard work of paddling against the current, and a little after noon they reached the long lake of which Dominique had told them.

Here Jimmie Lad paddled as vigorously

he know that, and he know, if he keep this gang of his down there, nobody know about it."

Jimmie Lad glanced up at his father, expecting a storm of protest, but Marshall only asked—

"Have you been on this lake, Dominique?"

"Sure. Me no believe about the *windigo*."

"Tell us about it—how big and all."

The old man explained in detail every bit of shore-line, though he said it was forty years since he had been there. When he finished, Marshall Wells turned and shook hands with Jimmie Dunn.

"So long, Jimmie," he said casually. "We'll be back in a few days. Have Dominique change the dressing tonight. I'm leaving fresh ones."

He and Jimmie Lad walked down to their canoe and paddled off as the first streaks of dawn appeared in the northeast.

CHAPTER VIII

MAN AND MAN

"HOW about the dead man we left in the canoe back on the point, dad?" asked Jimmie Lad as they started. "There is a sand beach just beyond."

"Turn around, and we'll take care of him now," was the answer.

They went back a quarter of a mile, and, while Marshall began to dig a grave in the sand with his paddle, Jimmie Lad brought the canoe with the dead man in it to the beach. The task was soon completed, and again they started south, paddling steadily and in silence until after the sun had risen.

Spirit Lake was twenty-five miles long, and the river they sought was fifteen miles from the post. Two hours after leaving Jimmie Dunn and Dominique, they passed through a group of islands and entered a stretch of open water about eight miles in length.

"The river must be down there," said Marshall. "The four who got away aren't going back to Little Spirit Lake, or they were in such a hurry they are in the river now. They had six hours' start."

Jimmie Lad stopped paddling and stood up in the stern. He looked across the stretch for a moment and then knelt and turned their craft toward the last of the islands they were passing.

"I think I see them now," he said as his father turned in protest. "We'll climb up this rock and be certain."

He led the way up from the shore until they were thirty feet above the water.

"There they are!" he exclaimed as his father came up beside him. "They can't be more than four or five miles ahead of us. If it were a smaller canoe, we couldn't see it."

"They're traveling very slowly," said his father. "Evidently they don't expect pursuit. That's all the better for us, and we can be sure of reaching Little Spirit Lake in plenty of time."

Jimmie Lad had been sniffing and looking around while his father was speaking.

"I smell smoke," he said as he started down the rock on the other side. "There it is. They stopped here for a meal, and their fire is still smoldering. That explains why they are no farther away. Come on, and we'll soon tell whether they are in a hurry."

When they were again in the canoe, Jimmie Lad stood up in the stern.

"I can barely see a speck down there," he announced. "They're just above the horizon. We'll paddle half an hour at about a four-mile clip, and then I'll look again. If they are out of sight, they are gaining on us."

"Of course," answered his father, hiding a sudden admiration in a casual remark.

They paddled steadily for thirty minutes by Jimmie Lad's watch. The young man again stood up. For some time he searched the horizon, and then he dropped to his knees and began to paddle vigorously.

"We'll have to hurry, dad," he said. "They are out of sight. They are gaining."

They paddled without a halt until the mouth of the river was only a mile ahead.

"We'll be taking chances now until we turn off on that route Dominique showed us," said Marshall. "We'll have to keep our eyes open every minute, or they will pop out on us."

"I don't dope it out that way at all," declared Jimmie confidently. "These three or four men—depending upon whether I winged one there at the dock—know that there is to be no looting of Spirit Lake Post. They know they must get out of the country as quickly as possible.

"When they came last night, they had just about enough grub to take them back as before, and for a time the canoe shot ahead more easily in the still water of the lake. A half-hour later, however, he began to notice a slight drag. There was not the spring and swing in the quick strokes. He had the feeling that some one was behind, holding a heavy hand on the stern.

At first Jimmie Lad blamed himself. But he knew that he was as strong as ever; that he could continue another twelve hours without losing speed. He began to experiment. In the middle of a stroke he suddenly relaxed. The canoe dropped back instantly. He missed a couple of strokes while he shifted a pack in front of him. His father kept on paddling but with an added swing of his body and a greater hunch in his shoulders.

"The game old sport!" Jimmie thought. "He's all in, and he won't quit."

He smiled and began to increase the strength of each of his own strokes. The canoe shot ahead as before, but seventy-five per cent. of the propelling power came from the stern.

Jimmie knew that his father, fresh from an office in Chicago, was soft and sore. He knew he had punished himself in the three-hundred-mile paddle from the railroad to Spirit Lake. He had had no sleep the night before. His body simply was not equal to the pace, no matter what it might have accomplished in the exploring days.

From his own experience, Jimmie knew what the silent figure in the bow was suffering. There was that sharp, binding pain across the back of the neck just above the shoulders. There was that cramp in the knees from long hours of kneeling. Arms, shoulders and back were subject to wrenches and stabs and twists. The young man drove on harder than ever, even when his own muscles protested, and his lips were parted in a tender smile.

"Poor old dad," he thought. "He has done it and lots of things far harder, and he can't understand why he doesn't do it again."

Marshall Wells was not so preoccupied with the possible fate of Alan McKerral that he did not know what was going on in the stern of the canoe. He had paddled too many thousand miles, most of it weary, discouraging work, not to feel it instantly. The old canoeman can be blindfolded and still describe every movement made in the craft; can almost know the facial expression of the man behind him. And Marshall knew everything that Jimmie Lad was doing.

At first, because he was sensitive, because he felt rather than realized that a contest between youth and maturity was taking place, he believed that he read the thoughts of his son in the stern. He even braced himself for the taunts that he believed would come—the thoughtless gibes that roll so heedlessly from a boy's lips.

When none came; when the canoe continued to shoot forward as swiftly as ever, even as his own strokes grew steadily weaker; when he felt the seemingly infinite power that was being expanded through the stern paddle, he began to read the mind and the heart of the man behind him.

Marshall missed a stroke, so astonishing had been the thought. It was a man in the stern, a man grown, able, resourceful, quick, dependable. Marshall had been confident that he had been journeying with a boy—with the boy he had watched grow through so many years, the boy who had been carefully trained in the many branches of woodcraft, the boy upon whom three old-timers had lavished their advice and experience, in whom they had sought by divers ways to instill the courage and clearness of vision so essential in the far places. He and Jimmie Dunn had labored so intently they had completed their work without realizing it.

Marshall reviewed what had happened since Jimmie had arrived at Spirit Lake. He saw for the first time that his son had led, not followed; that he had never hesitated, even at the risk of defending the post from the fur thieves. His advice had been good. No emergency had found him at a loss. He was always ready and eager.

The father's impulse was to turn, to grasp his son's hand, to tell him of the discovery, to tell him he was no longer a boy. A natural reserve and the feeling that Jimmie Lad would only laugh restrained him. Still he felt that he must say something. His heart was too full. His boy a man! The little baby he had left in its mother's arms when he had gone North to find Jimmie Dunn now swinging a far stronger paddle than himself! The youngster upon whom he had spent so much time and thought, whom he had trained and guarded, now leading him on a dangerous enterprise!

"Jimmie," he said when at last he felt that he could speak calmly—could hide his emotion, "you're carrying the load. I know it, and I'm much obliged."

"That's all right, dad," was the quick answer. "You didn't get any sleep last night, and you had a hard trip in. I've had time to rest up."

Marshall felt more power than ever being applied to the paddle in the stern, while the weight of his own strokes increased with the new warmth in his heart.

* * *

THE lake on which they were traveling was long and narrow. Several times they believed they had reached the end of it, but another stretch always opened past what they hoped was the last point. It was nearly sunset when at last they entered a bay and found that further progress by water was shut off.

They had difficulty in finding the portage which, Dominique had told them, had not been used for fifty years or more. Jimmie Lad was the first to see an old blaze, but on shore they could find no traces of a path.

"Little Spirit Lake must be right through this draw," said Jimmie. "You take the blankets and grub, and I'll take the canoe, and we'll bust right through."

His object was two-fold. He wanted his father to be relieved of the heavy work of carrying the canoe, even one end of which would be annoying in the thick growth, and he knew that one man unencumbered could watch the course better.

His deductions as to the portage proved to be correct, and after fifteen minutes of difficult progress they came out on the shore of a lake. Marshall saw the water through the trees and halted until Jimmie Lad had set down the canoe. Then they crawled forward until they could look out over the water.

"We've found it!" whispered Jimmie excitedly. "And we're ahead! There is their camp down the shore about a mile, just as Dominique said, and there isn't a canoe on the lake or on the land."

"They'll come from the other end, about three miles down there," said Marshall after consulting the Naskapi's map. "If Alan is here, he'll be at their camp and we can get him and be away before the other canoe arrives. Come on."

Jimmie watched the western end of the lake for the expected fur thieves while his father kept his eyes on the shore ahead of them. The camp of the raiders was not visible after they had started, the buildings being at the head of a small bay. They landed before reaching this and crawled through the brush to the edge of the clearing.

"They certainly made extensive plans to get that fur," whispered Marshall after they had looked the place over. "This camp looks as if it had been built in the Winter or last Fall."

"It's your idea that McKerral is a prisoner here, isn't it?" asked Jimmie Lad.

"I feel sure of it."

"You think they left some one to guard him?"

"Perhaps, though they would want every available man in the canoes to handle so much fur. In that case they would have locked him up in one of the buildings. We'll watch for a while longer, and, if we don't see any one, we'll investigate."

Ten minutes went by, and no one appeared.

"You watch the first building, and I'll watch the other," Marshall said. "Keep your rifle ready, and we'll see what's here."

They walked across to the nearest cabin. The door was unlocked, and they opened it. One glance showed everything in the cabin, a rusty sheet-iron stove, bunks along two walls and a rough pole table.

"Nothing here," said Jimmie Lad shortly. "Let's try the other one."

They entered the second building to find a long table down the center, a hewn-board cupboard and sheet-iron cook-stove.

After one quick glance around the room father and son faced each other. To Jimmie Lad the disappointment had not come as a shock. His had not been the desire or the confidence. But to Marshall Wells, who had so firmly believed that he would find his old friend a prisoner of the fur raiders, it was a blow both to his faith and his hope.

McKerral was alive. The Naskapi had led them to believe that. But, if he were not a prisoner, why had he done nothing to save the fur? The Alan McKerral of the old days would have broken his heart scheming and working. For the first time Marshall faced his son without a word to say in his friend's defense.

"Let's look around," suggested Jimmie Lad. "We may learn something that will explain all this."

He really did not hope to find any other answer to the puzzle than the one he now believed in, but he did wish to end the trying situation for his father. They walked about the clearing. There were sledges and snow-shoes, bits of broken equipment, old clothing, the usual refuse of a Winter camp in the North. They turned in at the sleeping-cabin and counted the bunks.

"There are nine!" exclaimed Jimmie Lad excitedly. "And we have accounted for only eight in the gang."

"That means that Alan was here once," said his father slowly.

"And all except one expected to come back here," added Jimmie Lad, pointing to the walls above the bunks.

It was true. Above eight bunks hung bits of personal equipment and articles of clothing. In eight bunks there were tumbled blankets. The ninth alone was bare. One of the occupants had taken all his belongings when he had left the place. And Alan McKerral had been there if the Naskapi had not lied. The ninth bunk must have been his.

Marshall, despondent, turned out of doors, and Jimmie Lad followed. While his son searched the place for another possible hiding-place, the father stood staring off down the lake. For the first time since his arrival he was at a loss for an explanation, for a plan of action. There was only one possible solution, and that was that Alan McKerral, left a prisoner, had freed himself and was on his way to the post.

If without a canoe, he would have started overland. It could not be possible that he had used the other waterway and allowed himself to be captured by the raiders on their way back to their camp. This last could be determined only by waiting for the return of the big canoe.

He had hardly arrived at this conclusion when Jimmie Lad called excitedly:

"Dad! Here they come down the lake."

They ran through the brush to their canoe and, keeping close to the shore, paddled back the way they had come.

CHAPTER IX

JIMMIE VOLUNTEERS

THEIR canoe was dark green; their clothing was neutral, and they were in the shade. Even though the other canoe was in sight most of the time, it was nearly three miles away, and they were confident they could not be seen. When they reached the portage, they carried their craft into the brush and found a place from which they could watch the approach of the fur thieves.

"They're not in sight!" cried Marshall as he looked down the lake.

"Yes, they are," answered Jimmie Lad, "but they're not headed for their camp. They're way out in the center. Do you suppose, dad, that they moved to another place just before they left?"

"No, because they left everything in those two cabins. I wonder what they're up to?"

The canoe they were watching was coming straight up the center of the lake less than two miles away. After they had waited ten minutes, Jimmie Lad exclaimed:

"They're going to that little rock island out there in the center. What do you suppose that's for?"

In five minutes the canoe disappeared on the other side of the island. It was little more than a rock in the center of the lake, a common enough thing in the North Country. No trees grew upon it, though there were patches and fringes of brush, and the greatest dimension could not have been more than one hundred feet.

"They're landed on the other side," said Marshall. "They must have cached some grub or something out there. There were four men paddling."

Five minutes went by, and the canoe did not appear, nor could they see any one on the rock. Then the big freighting Peterborough suddenly shot out from the other side and headed straight across toward the two cabins.

The sun had set, but the sky in the northwest was a vivid red. There was no wind, and the lake was aglow from the reflection. Across this sea of fire the canoe sped, and, as they watched, Jimmie Lad suddenly sprang to his feet.

"Look, dad!" he cried. "There are five men in the canoe now!"

His father had arisen, and after a long look he said:

"You're right, lad. And do you see that only four are paddling? The fifth man is up in the bow, just sitting there."

They looked at each other, the light of a new hope in their eyes. Marshall's voice was husky when he spoke.

"It's Alan. They put him on that island so that he couldn't get away. They have held him prisoner, just as I said. And now! Do you see?"

Jimmie Lad went back to the canoe and picked up the two rifles and some extra ammunition. He handed his father one of the weapons and led the way into the brush.

Darkness came before they had covered more than half the distance to the camp. The brush was thick; the ground was wet and boggy; windfalls were piled high in places. When they knew that they could not be seen, they walked along the more open shore. A quarter of a mile from the cabins they saw that a big fire had been built in the clearing.

"Wonder what that's for?" said Jimmie.

As if in answer a shrill yell rang out over the lake and echoed from the island.

"Hurry!" whispered Marshall. "That's an Indian! Hurry!"

They ran now, careful only that they did not make too much noise. They did not stop until, when one hundred yards away, they caught a glimpse of the clearing from a point. Several figures moved back and forth quickly before the fire. But, as Marshall and his son watched, they could count only four. Suddenly Jimmie Lad gripped his father's arm.

"Look!" he whispered. "They've got him tied to a tree!"

The purpose of the fur thieves was unmistakable. The roaring flames, the bound victim, the dark figures—all seemed to have sprung alive from stories of the days of Indian torture. For a moment it seemed unbelievable. Then the thought of Alan McKerral made it real.

Instantly the two turned into the brush and began to crawl toward the clearing. They went as swiftly as they could without making any noise. In five minutes they were behind a thick spruce sapling at the edge of the clearing, lying side by side.

"I can't see him," whispered Marshall after he had peered around on his side.

Jimmie was watching from the other, and, as his father finished speaking, the young man drew back quickly.

"They've begun!" he exclaimed in a higher tone than he had intended. "It's McKerral, and they've heated some irons red-hot."

At the risk of being seen, Marshall arose to his knees and looked over the top of the brush. The four men before the fire had been shouting and shrieking, but now they were quiet, and Marshall feared that they had heard Jimmie's exclamation.

But, as he looked past the fire, he saw that they were too intent on something else. They stood in a half-circle before Alan McKerral, who was tied to a tree. Each held in his hands a long rod, the ends of which glowed against the dark background of the forest.

"Now, McKerral," came a voice, "we've quit fooling. Tell us where that treaty money is, or we'll run these into your eyes."

"Go to ——," was the calm answer.

The fur trader thrust his red-hot iron toward McKerral's face.

The post-manager did not flinch, did not even wink. Jimmie Lad started to rise, but his father laid a hand on one shoulder.

"Wait and listen," he whispered. "They are only bluffing now."

"The fur is gone," said the man with the iron rod. "You beat us there, McKerral. Allardyce is dead, and we've lost out on the big haul. But you had that treaty money on you when we caught you, and Allardyce got it. He cached it, and you saw him do it. You two were here alone, and you know where it is. We're going to have that much, anyway, for our Winter's work. Now, where is it?"

Again the rod was raised, but it had cooled and no longer glowed. With a curse the man threw it aside and reached for one of the three which were eagerly held toward him. As he turned back toward his victim, McKerral began to speak.

"You've lost your heads," he said calmly. "With Allardyce leading, you fellows had a chance. He never made mistakes. Now he's gone, and you've run wild. You think Allardyce let me see him cache that money. He didn't. He never made mistakes."

"You lie!" shrieked one of the men. "You lie, McKerral. You were with Allardyce when he cached the money, and you know where it is."

"Yes, and you're going to tell us," exclaimed the one who evidently had assumed leadership of the remnants of the gang. "Here is your last chance."

He held the glowing rod so close to McKerral's face the post-manager's whiskers crinkled and smoked. But he did not even turn his head. Instead he laughed, a full, hearty, confident laugh.

"You poor fools!" he exclaimed. "You thought you could get away with this thing. You didn't know you were Allardyce's dupes. You didn't know he only used you. You don't even know that Allardyce is not dead; that your little fracas there at the post was planned like the rest of it. You don't know right now that Allardyce is on his way out with the pick of the fur, with about thirty thousand dollars worth of skins in a canoe, and that the Naskapi is with him."

"You lie, McKerral!" shouted the leader. "I saw him fall."

McKerral laughed, more heartily than before, for there had been a note of uncertainty in the leader's voice.

"Of course you saw him fall," the post manager said. "That was part of the plan. But those others whom Allardyce pretended had tricked you were stationed there by him, and they were firing blanks. Allardyce and Louis Leveque were the only ones who fell, weren't they. The rest of you ran, and, as soon as you were out of the way, Allardyce and Leveque got on to their feet, and the Naskapi and Joe Simpson came around from the dwelling-house, and half an hour later all four were headed south with the otter skins and the black foxes, and the cross foxes—all the best of the fur, a good thirty thousand dollars worth.

"That part of it was planned before you ever came up here. Allardyce wasn't going to split that among eight when he could split it among four."

"You lie, McKerral," repeated the leader, and this time his doubt was evident. "But whether you lie or not, that treaty money is here. Allardyce never took it with him. You know where it is, and we're going to have it. I'll count three, and then we'll begin with your eyes."

Again McKerral laughed, this time gloatingly.

"Burn!" he cried. "You white-livered curs! Look behind! Make a move and you're dead, all of you!"

THE four men whirled, for there had been such supreme confidence in the post-manager's voice they could not help but believe. And, as they looked, they saw Jimmie Lad and his father, their rifles leveled, standing shoulder high above the brush at the edge of the clearing.

Instantly the four men scattered. One ran straight through the fire, kicking it right and left. Darkness, broken only by the flowing embers, engulfed the clearing.

Marshall Wells had plunged forward, but Jimmie Lad grasped his shoulder and held him back.

"Watch out," he whispered. "We don't know where they are, and they have rifles."

They stood together listening, ready for the expected attack. Then from the water came a voice. It was followed by the clatter of men scrambling into a canoe and the swirl of water behind desperate paddles.

"They're going," whispered Marshall, "and we've let them. Now for Alan."

He walked toward the tree to which the post-manager had been tied and softly called his name. There was no answer. One of the smoldering pieces of firewood suddenly burst into flame and lighted up the clearing. McKerral was not there.

"Alan!" Marshall called loudly. "Alan! Where are you?"

He ran at once toward the water, Jimmie Lad beside him.

"They couldn't have taken him," whispered the young man. "They didn't have time."

"Who's that?" came from the darkness at the lake shore.

"Alan!" cried Marshall as he ran forward. "It's Wells!"

"Marsh!" roared the post-manager as he rushed forward. "What in heaven's name are you doing here, and how did you get here?"

The two friends clasped hands in the darkness as Jimmie Lad came up.

"And Jimmie Dunn, too!" cried McKerral. "You two never were very far apart."

"It's a new partner this trip, Alan," laughed Marshall.

"Not Jimmie Lad! Lord, who would have thought it. You weren't that big when I first saw you, Marsh! But how did you two happen to be here? I wish you had arrived ten minutes earlier."

"We were here, hiding in the brush," said Jimmie Lad. "You must have seen us, or you wouldn't have told them to look."

"Look! You don't mean to tell me you were standing there when they turned away from me?"

"And you don't mean to say that you didn't see us?" demanded Marshall.

"See you! I had no reason to know you were outside of Chicago or that any one else would be here on Little Spirit Lake except Allardyce's gang."

"And you were bluffing all that time?" asked Jimmie Lad in amazement.

"Of course. They were in a hurry to lay their hands on that treaty money and get outside as quickly as possible, and they weren't too careful as to how they tied me. Allardyce had all the brains in the outfit, anyhow. I was working away at the rope, and I had it undone when I told them to look, knowing they would and that I could scatter that fire and get away."

He stopped and began to laugh, one hand on Marshall's shoulder, the other on Jimmie Lad's.

"I never looked, or I would have been more surprized than they were," he said. And then he became suddenly serious and very much in a hurry.

"But the job's only half done. Lad, let me have your rifle and some spare ammunition. I haven't any time to lose."

"But those fellows have gone," said Marshall, "and they won't come back."

"They will come back," answered Alan determinedly, "because I'll make them. They must come back—or some of them at least. They didn't get the fur, but they did ruin the business of Spirit Lake Post. They've scared out every hunter, and I must get them all back before Fall. And I can't prove to the Indians it was men instead of spirits unless I have some of the men as exhibits."

"But how can you get them?" asked Marshall.

"They're headed for the outside, and I'll just keep going until I catch them," was the reply. "They have a light canoe hidden in the brush, and there is grub in the cabin there."

Marshall Wells did not comment. They had walked back into the clearing and gathered the scattered firewood, and the place was again lighted. He stood looking at the flames which Jimmie Lad and Alan were feeding with fresh fuel.

While they had been lying back in the brush a short time before, Marshall had regretted bringing Jimmie along. They two faced four men, and, even when he had risen to save his friend, he wished that he had been alone; that the boy were back at the post with Jimmie Dunn.

He saw in Alan's pursuit of the four fur thieves an even greater danger. His duty was to his friend, but he felt now that there was a greater duty to his son. They had done everything possible to save Alan, and they had succeeded. The post-manager's future course was his own choosing. He did not ask help, and he did not expect it.

Jimmie Lad, once the fire was going well, stood looking eagerly at his father. When there was no proposal that they join Alan in the pursuit, he stepped closer.

"I tell you what, dad," he said, "you stay here tonight and get a good rest. You're all in. And I'll go with Mr. McKerral after these fellows. You can go back to the post the way we came, and we'll be there in a few days."

"Not for a minute!" broke in the post-manager. "This is my affair and the company's. I don't know all you two have done, though I know you drove Allardyce's gang away from the post—from what those four told me. But I won't have you taking chances going after these men."

Marshall had been stung even more by Jimmie's misunderstanding of his silence than by the reference to his physical condition, and, though he feared it for the boy's sake, he was glad somehow that Jimmie Lad had taken it for granted that they should see the affair through; that they should refuse to permit McKerral to go off alone.

The father realized, too, that he was near the end of his strength; that the long strain, the lack of sleep and the heavy work had greatly weakened him. But at the moment he did not feel it. The straight, strong figure of his son, now a man, the eager face, were as much an inspiration as a challenge to the endurance he had once known.

"We'll go, Alan, both of us," he said quietly. "You need help, and we both want to give it."

CHAPTER X

OLD MEN AND YOUNG

"WHAT is your plan?" Marshall asked after a hurried loading of the canoe with what food and equipment they needed.

"First that treaty money," said Alan,

and he ran back into the brush behind the clearing.

In five minutes he returned, strapping a money-belt about his waist.

"There is only one way out," he said, "one direct way, and that is up the Sturgeon River, the one that flows into Spirit Lake. They must take it. They haven't any grub, and it is the route by which they came in and the only one they know.

"It's the easiest, too, though, like all this North Country, you can find any number of waterways. What I plan is this: There is a portage on the south side of this lake that leads into a string of small lakes, a route which reaches the Sturgeon twenty miles up. We'll take it, get in ahead of them and capture the whole gang on a portage. They will have farther to travel, but we have more portages. We should beat them by a few hours if we hurry, however."

They paddled straight across the lake, passing the small rock island in the center.

"That is where they kept me while they went after the fur," explained Alan. "They knew it was too far for me to swim in this cold water, and there isn't enough brush on it to float a rabbit. You must have believed I was the one who was trying to rob the post, Marsh?"

Marshall Wells had forgotten the doubts that had begun to creep in. He was satisfied in finding his old friend, but Jimmie Lad was all the more curious to have an explanation of several things.

"Everything pointed to it," he said frankly. "Even Dominique believes it."

"That letter was the finishing touch, eh?" laughed McKerral.

"You mean that letter from the St. Louis fur company?" demanded Jimmie Lad in amazement. "You mean you did pretend to be in with them?"

"No, lad," came in a chuckle from the stern. "It was hatred, a man's hatred of me, that did it. It's the strongest thing in the world, that, when it's turned loose."

Jimmie was about to retort that he knew something far stronger. He was not entirely reconciled to the fact that McKerral was innocent. The proof had been too strong; he wanted some points cleared up.

"John Allardyce was a Hudson's Bay Company man," McKerral continued. "He was once manager at Spirit Lake for five years. Then he was sent to a post near me. After he had been there two years, I began to get queer ideas about how things were going with him. I looked into it and found he was in with the opposition, selling out the Hudson's Bay.

"I didn't report him. I just got the proof and then put the matter up to Allardyce himself. He quit, and he quit with an intense hatred of me and of the company. I never saw him again until a week ago.

"Late last Winter I began to hear stories from the hunters. They were talking about the spirits coming back to Spirit Lake and driving out the company. The company made the Indians believe it had driven out the spirits about a hundred years ago, and things have been peaceful ever since. Of course, I had to get at the bottom of the story, but the more I tried the less I knew.

"My first thought was that the opposition was trying to get in. But there wasn't a sign of a new post or of white men in the country. That was strange, and I took to scouting around all alone.

"It was then I began to see what was up. I ran across a snow-shoe track just north of here that meant Allardyce. He had some Alaskan shoes—he had been on the Canadian side a couple of years—and he wouldn't use anything else. Made a nuisance of himself telling how much better they were. I trailed him nearly to Little Spirit Lake, and then I saw what was up.

"Allardyce, to get even with me, to get revenge on the company for his fancied wrong, was trying to demoralize the post with his stories of spirits. He knew the post, knew the hunters, knew the legends. He was crooked clear through. He believed he could operate from Little Spirit Lake without his presence being known. It was as clear as day what he intended to do, and I started to get ready. It was then, Marsh, that I wrote to you to keep the lad at home."

"The letter came a week late, and you put it so strong Jimmie Dunn and I started at once to catch him."

"Jimmie Dunn! Is he up here, too?"

McKerral's curiosity as to what had happened at the post now became the greatest, and Marshall gave him a brief history of events since the arrival of Jimmie Lad.

McKerral was silent when he finished,

and he did not resume his own story until Jimmie Lad asked a question.

"I was a fool, but I wanted some excitement," he replied. "I haven't had any for years. There's nothing so dull as a post without opposition, but here was a chance. Besides, I like to run my own post without help, and Allardyce didn't frighten me. That's why I didn't notify the district office.

"I let things run along until all the fur was in and baled. The hunters were all there. I didn't see how he could get the fur, even if he did have a gang of seven men besides himself—as I learned by counting tracks in the Winter.

"Then one night rockets shot up from two places out in the lake, and paper balloons began to sail over the post. In the morning there wasn't a wigwam or an Indian left. I couldn't stop them. Only the servants stayed. I saw what the plan was, and that night Duncan McFarlan and I started to move the fur down to the island. Old Dominique was the only other one I could trust. But he has been a faithful servant for a lifetime, and he is old. Duncan asked me to send him to the outpost to keep him out of danger, and I did.

"With the fur out of the way I thought everything was all right. Then the next night they came to kidnap me. Allardyce was clever. He took me by surprize. Duncan was with me and ran. I didn't know until you told me that he was dead.

"They brought me to Little Spirit Lake. Allardyce was so confident, his plans had worked so well and he hated me so, he explained everything he had done. He took pleasure in taunting me. He gloated over the fact that he was going to make me the goat, as you say down in the States, Jimmie Lad. He told me about the letter he had left on my desk when he kidnaped me and of how they had arranged to get the fur out without being caught. He was going to take me with him for a ways, and everything was planned to make it appear that I was the guilty one. It was a wonderful scheme, one hatched by pure hatred.

"As soon as he had me safe on Little Spirit Lake, Allardyce planned to go after the fur, believing the post would be deserted by the servants when they learned I had disappeared. But two of his men, Joe Simpson and a Naskapi Indian, decided to get to the fur first, take the best of it and leave. Allardyce had picked his men from all over Canada, white and red, men who had been at his posts and who were in his power or easily handled in such an affair. He spent two days trying to find Simpson and the Naskapi and then started after the fur with three freight canoes and five men. You know the rest, and I want to say right now to both of you that you saved my post."

They had reached the other side of the lake, and in the work of portaging there was no opportunity for further conversation. Afloat on the next lake, Alan said:

"You can see why I must get hold of these fellows, the only ones left. The hunters still believe in the spirit story, and they must be brought back and convinced of the truth before the Fall hunt begins. They're scattered all over the bush, and I must hurry."

They paddled and portaged steadily until dawn. McKerral was fresh and eager, and his vigor and strength won Jimmie Lad at last to the complete idolatry of his boyhood. His own weariness was forgotten, and between them they relieved his father of everything except a pretense of work. Marshall, in fact, was near exhaustion, and finally, when dawn came and they were shooting down a swift stream with the Sturgeon only ten miles ahead, he lay down in the bottom of the canoe and slept.

"He's had too much," whispered Jimmie Lad from the bow.

"He was a wonder once," said McKerral.

"And he still is," was the quick defense. "Only give him time to break in right."

They reached the Sturgeon. No one was in sight, and they turned up-stream to the first rapids. There was a little creek entering just below the portage, and McKerral ran the canoe into it.

"We'll let him sleep," he whispered as they got out. "We'll hide and get them as they land."

They crept through the brush to the end of the portage and examined the trail. Confident that no one had crossed, they selected a spot from which they could see down-river. The time slipped by, and Jimmie dozed off, leaving McKerral to watch alone. Several hours passed, and the fleeing fur thieves did not appear. The post-manager slipped out to examine the trail again. As he slipped back into the brush, he saw a canoe far down-stream.

"They're coming, lad," he whispered as he shook Jimmie. "They'll be here in ten minutes. We'll both rise together and should cover them easily."

Jimmie Lad was alert instantly, and together they lay in wait as the canoe came closer. They counted four men in the big freighter.

"When they tied me to the tree, they left their rifles in the canoe," whispered McKerral. "So they had them when they left Little Spirit Lake. We want to cover them while they're busy with the paddles, just as they land."

The canoe was only one hundred yards away and just entering a big eddy which would sweep it up to the portage. The current was very swift, and a delicate landing was necessary or the canoe would, be swept out into the tail of the rapids.

All four men were paddling as they shot forward. McKerral laid a hand on Jimmie Lad's shoulder to keep him down until the last moment, only to leap up himself when he heard a crashing of brush down the shore. The four paddlers looked up instantly, too surprized to keep their blades in the water. McKerral saw Marshall Wells, dazed with sleep, mystified by his surroundings, emerge from the brush on the river bank.

At the same instant the big canoe, in the grip of the powerful eddy, shot forward, cutting straight into the foot of the rapids. Two men reached for their rifles. Two others back-paddled desperately. The canoe was lifted on a great, curling roller and flipped over.

"They'll drown, every one!" cried the post-manager.

Jimmie Lad was gone. He had dropped his rifle and darted into the brush. Less than a minute later he appeared in their own canoe, shooting out across the eddy and down-stream in the white water.

One man was clinging to the overturned freighter, and Jimmie Lad passed him in pursuit of two heads which showed occasionally. He caught the first and grasped the drowning man's collar. The speed of the canoe slackened, and the man grasped the stern and hung on.

Jimmie Lad, crawling forward, caught the second one and held his head above the surface.

They were now out of the swift water, and, when his second prisoner had recovered sufficiently to grasp the bow, Jimmie paddles them slowly ashore.

McKerral had started at once down the river bank, and he was ready to meet them. As the two fur thieves crawled out of the water, Jimmie Lad again put out into the current in pursuit of the big canoe and the man who had clung to it. The fourth never was seen again.

Five minutes later canoe and prisoner were ashore, and the three men were in front of McKerral's rifle. Marshall joined them, and plans for the return to the post were made.

"We can make it tonight if we keep going," said McKerral. "It's down-stream."

IT WAS after dark when they reached the rock island upon which the fur had been hidden, and much later when Dominique and Jimmie Dunn had been taken aboard and the entire party had landed at the post. The prisoners were locked in the warehouse, and Marshall, Jimmie Lad and McKerral gathered in the dwelling-house at Jimmie Dunn's bedside.

"The fur is safe, and the business of the post will be before Fall," said Alan, "thanks to you three. I'll not say any more than that. I can't."

"Get up, boy!" exclaimed Jimmie Dunn. "You're on my leg."

Jimmie Lad had sat down on the edge of the bed and now was lying out full length, his eyes closed.

"The boy is all in," whispered Jimmie Dunn as he carefully hitched himself over. "Too much for him."

"Too much!" snorted Alan. "Boy! He's not a boy, Jimmie Dunn! He's as good a man as you ever were. And I want to tell you two something. If you're going to take that Barren Ground trip you're always talking about, you had better start right now. You talked of training him to stand it. Why, he'll out-travel either one of you and out-game you. If you two don't do better, he'll think he's being taken along as a nurse."

The words were so nearly the same that Tom Gill had used a year before that for a moment neither Jimmie Dunn nor Marshall Wells spoke. Then the wounded man glanced up at his old friend.

"Alan is right, Marsh," he said. "We are in poor shape. But I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll stay right here with Alan this Summer. We'll get into shape. I'm not going to have Jimmie Lad leading me. We'll send for Tom Gill to come up, and this Fall the four of us will start for the Barren Grounds to be on hand next year."

"I don't know whether my business will—" began Marshall.

"Business nothing!" interrupted Jimmie Dunn. "We've made it the business of the last twenty years to train this boy for the real thing, and we've forgotten ourselves. I'm not going up there and have him wait for me, and you don't want to, either. Why, Marsh, we've got to train ourselve to catch up with him."

LURE OF THE LODE

by STEPHEN CHALMERS

Author of "Chaplain to the Buccaneers," "The Dance of the Golden Gods," etc.

OF THE seven who started from San Rosario and rode boldly into the desert after the treasure of Krumholz but three were left at the end of a week. Gallup, the American, McCullough, the Scot, and the Irishman, McGrue, were alive—more or less.

It was a mixed company in the beginning, drawn together from the human variorum of a republic where on no condition is extradition permissible. The magnet that drew them each to each in this case was a fortune in diamonds buried in the open desert somewhere to the northwest of San Rosario.

Nearly everybody in the republic knew the story of the Krumholz diamonds, and many a man, homesick and in need of money, wistfully eyed the desert to the west and north. But a man were mad even to conceive the project of setting out to find in that yawning, yellow waste a four-by-four-by-eight box, on the mere clue that it was buried in the sand—out there—somewhere.

But, as art sometimes conceals art, one open secret often hides a greater one not so open. Miguel Ceballos carried the direct clue, written down by himself on the margin of a Spanish newspaper torn off in a hurry when Krumholz, dying in Miguel's *posada*, began to gasp out truth and life in the same fleeting breath.

Krumholz, it should be explained, came to San Rosario like many another man—in a hurry. He said his name was Smith and that he was a pastry-cook by trade.

Nobody even smiled. Two days after his arrival he hired a horse and rode out alone into the desert.

For a pastry-cook he was remarkably efficient in details having nothing to do with crust. He left without announcing his destination, without telling any one even that he was going, even the owner of the horse. The owner said nothing, inasmuch as Señor Smith paid for hire more than the *caballo* was worth. Also, as transpired later, Smith—or Krumholz—took with him food, water and a very excellent compass, the latter being found in his effects after he died.

He came back after two days and settled down in San Rosario to a quiet, unobtrusive life—in a way. He drank large quantities of Spanish cognac, and, when he was drunk he bragged of his great exploit: how he, a German in the employ of an Amsterdam house, had formulated his plan over twenty years, during which he crept into the absolute confidence of every diamond merchant in the Dutch city—where he was an appraiser of crystallized sunbeams in one of the foremost houses—and how, when his hour struck and he found the finest consignment of twenty years in his hands and a steamer due to sail that night, he took advantage of a berth canceled at the last moment by a certain Herr Schmidt.

Schmidt's name appeared on the passenger list, and it was several days before the steamship company thought it might help to draw attention to the transfer of the berth. Even then it was not believed that the person who had sailed as Herr Stuckmann was the trusted Krumholz. Herr Krumholz, they said, was still in Amsterdam; ill, perhaps, or in the hands of robbers, together with the diamonds. By the time the good merchants of Amsterdam arrived at the correct solution, Krumholz had reached Dutch Guiana. Before cabled authority could be applied, he had made his way out of Dutch jurisdiction into the republic where San Rosario is and extradition is not.

All this his exiled associates pieced together from fragments dropped from the lips that touched cognac. The thing that incurred strong dislike for Krumholz was that, when he was very drunk, he would burst out in a guffaw and relate how, so little did he trust his new friends, he had buried a quarter of a million in a "leedle, leedle box" not forty miles from San Rosario, and they were welcome to it if they could find it.

"Und I vill tell you vere it iss," he would hiccup. "It iss out dere—in de desert!"

That is preliminary to the story proper.

ONE evening, quite suddenly, Krumholz developed delirium tremens. His hallucination—the main one—was that "they" were after his treasure, following him, spying upon him, sitting by his bed at night, hoping he would talk in his sleep—for which reason he dared not sleep. The fixed idea fed upon itself. He neither ate nor slept, and in the middle of one night he died—quite quietly. Before the grim moment he was quite lucid.

About that time he felt the need of a friend. Ceballos, who kept the *posada*, had been that. Krumholz had run short of cash. Ceballos, wise even among his kind, had fed and housed him for months and never once refused the half-hourly demand for cognac. But the lucid interval was short; so was Krumholz' breath; death came swiftly. This is all that Señor Ceballos of the Posada Estrella got down on the torn-off scrap of newspaper margin:

"Thirty miles west—Painted Rocks—north—north—keep the line—about five or six miles. No marks—no! Sand—sand—keep the line—north—from Painted Rocks. Buried by night—two hundred and forty-seven thousand——"

That was all. Whether the treasure was worth two hundred and forty-seven thousand in dollars, guilders, crowns or pounds sterling did not matter so much for the moment. It was a lot of money, at least. The directions at first sight were vague, yet, after Señor Ceballos had studied the fragmentary deposition very carefully, he concluded that they were not so very vague. Reduced to plain terms and continuity they were:

"Thirty miles west to Painted Rocks. Then five or six miles north on a dead compass line. Treasure thereabouts."

It should not be so very difficult. Ceballos knew the pile of rocks of varicolored strata known as Painted Rocks, thirty miles over the desert west from San Rosario. But that "five or six" miles north was likely to be the difficulty. It meant digging along a line at least a mile long.

This he could not hope to do alone. He

must choose associates: he must divulge his secret to a selected few. Of course, they would not work on such a job on a basis of wages. They might agree to do so, but the agreement would go the way of most good intentions at sight of the shimmering contents of that "leedle box." No; better be resigned at the outset to a share-and-share basis.

One by one Ceballos selected his men, swearing each to secrecy and refusing to tell each the names of the others in the lay until they should meet at a certain time and sally forth. There were Lefevre, the Frenchman, Gallup, the American, Danvers, the English embezzler, McCullough, the Scot, and McGrue, the Irishman. With Ceballos himself they were six—until Gruber, the German, took a hand in the game.

Nobody knew anything about Gruber, except that he had arrived some weeks after Krumholz. Curiously enough, these two national brothers promptly disliked one another most intensely. Anyway, after Krumholz' death and when Ceballos had his party all ready to start, Gruber walked into the Posada Estrella one night and whispered a demand to be admitted to the roster.

Señor Ceballos was surprized and shocked, but, as his secret seemed to have leaked and as Herr Gruber assured him it had—so far—leaked not beyond himself, the *señor* agreed to parley. First of all, he wanted to know which of the selected six was the traitor. And that led to an interesting explanation by Herr Gruber. He was quite frank in the matter.

Gruber was a detective. From Amsterdam he had followed Krumholz to Dutch Guiana. He was too late to find him extraditable. Yet he followed him to San Rosario, made his quarry's acquaintance and deliberately quarreled with him in order to disarm the suspicion which the diamond thief naturally formed of his nationality and his following arrival in San Rosario.

That was all, except that perhaps the atmosphere of the colony of the law's exiles crept into Gruber's blood and was a pleasing antidote to conscience. His business had been to recover the diamonds. Krumholz' hide was now worth nothing to those whose confidence he had betrayed. But— Well, finding himself in the safe shelter of San Rosario, liking the climate and the lax life and, particularly, discovering by his sleuthy abilities that others were likely to secure the treasure and defeat him both professionally and materially, Herr Gruber brought this ultimatum!

If he were not included in the party and in the sharing of the treasure, he would squeal the whole enterprise to the half-hundred needy adventurers now living in exile in San Rosario. No doubt Señor Ceballos knew what that would mean?

Señor Ceballos did. He saw his party embarrassed by a small army of camp-followers hovering on his trail like buzzards waiting to be in at the death. He saw the shares dwindling to perhaps one diamond apiece, leaving out the possibility that the *alcalde*, or even the *presidente*, might seize the entire loot as a perquisite in support of the law of non-extradition.

Gruber was admitted to a seventh share on a promise of secrecy, and thus the detective in the case buried his conscience in the vast cemetery of morals which is the pride of San Rosario.

* * *

AND so they started after meeting casually in the Posada Estrella. It savored of the ludicrous, that meeting. Not one man had an inkling of the identity of the other six, save Ceballos. The Irishman, McGrue, glared at the Frenchman, Lefevre. The Scot, McCullough, glared from under lowering, bushy brows at the Englishman, Danvers. When they had finished glaring at one another, all—Ceballos being self-informed—turned and glared unanimously at the unexpected seventh man, Gruber, who blinked placidly through his thick-pebbled spectacles and buried his face in a large glass of *cerveza negra*.

But that was only the comedy beginning. Only that part of the business had the slightest element of comedy in it.

For trouble developed the first night they made camp, coming in separately to a rendezvous about twelve miles west of San Rosario and in the open desert. They camped in the deep trough of a mighty sand-wave and held council. That is to say, they sat around an imaginary fire and glowered in the main, every man suspicious of all the others, although McGrue waxed satirical in a biting Irish way and fell afoul of the Scot, McCullough. Danvers, the Englishman, interfering, ran afoul of both Celts; and McGrue, losing his temper, knocked the London embezzler almost senseless with a single uppercut.

Ceballos was not so good a manager as Krumholz had been. True, he had brought along Krumholz' compass, but he had neglected water and provisions for his company. Yet he had told each man to provide for himself and mount; and this each had done to the extent of covering a period of three days, inside of which all expected to return with the treasure unearthed. It is a fact, however, that even murder has been bred in camp through the individual possession of an extra plug of tobacco or a can of sardines.

In this case suspicion and discontent over the general arrangements culminated that night in a six-sided quarrel, which threatened to be somewhat worse when Gruber intimated that he was the only level-headed person in the lot. Ceballos, secretly bitter at the invasion of Gruber, drew a knife. A stabbing was prevented only by the American, Gallup, sitting on the Spaniard and breaking his wrist by way of securing the knife.

Shortly afterward the silent, moody men stretched themselves around the imaginary fire and slept for the most part. The only sounds were the restless stirrings of the horses, hobbled against the likelihood of a general stampede back to the San Rosario stables, and the moanings of the Spaniard with the broken wrist. Gallup, the American, regretting his violence and sorry for the elderly innkeeper, finally got up, made his peace with Señor Ceballos, bound up his wrist with his own kerchief and gave him back his knife with a warning to be good.

Then Gallup slept, as presumably did all the rest—except two.

One was Ceballos. When sure that the others were asleep, he crawled over to the German, Gruber. He struck just once, and the detective stirred just once; then he straightened out in a curious way.

The other man who had been lying awake, nursing his jaw and considering what he would do to McGrue, was the embezzler, Danvers. He had witnessed the silent killing of Gruber and understood just how Ceballos felt about it. In fact, he crept over to the Spaniard and laid a hand on his wrist.

"Good work, *amigo*," he whispered in Spanish. "I, too, have a score to settle. Lend me your *cuchillo*."

In the weak, reactive moment when vengeance appeased becomes surfeit, Ceballos yielded the knife indifferently. Danvers rose to his feet, walked coolly toward the sleeping McGrue and dropped on one knee.

Then there came a yell as Ceballos, sensing his intent, dropped on the Englishman's back. Ceballos always had had a liking for the laughing, live-tongued Irishman.

Instantly the camp was awake. There was a half-moon in a clear sky, but it was some time before the facts could be arrived at. At first it looked black against Ceballos. Three of the company could speak little Spanish, and to the other three the excited *posada*-keeper's incoherent jabber was almost unintelligible.

Danvers, a cold rogue in his way, merely stated that Ceballos had stabbed Gruber in his sleep and that he, Danvers, had been just too late to save the man, although he had tackled the Spaniard to get the knife away. It was the Irishman, McGrue, who, despite the evidence of Gruber lying on the sand, stabbed to the heart, smelled a rat.

"Let's go aisy on this," said he. And Gallup backed him.

They got another version from Ceballos presently, and every one knew the Spaniard was telling the truth. The fact that Gruber was a detective employed to recover the precious stones, and that he might have betrayed them as he had proposed to betray his employers, went far to acquit Ceballos of any serious offense. And, as the Spaniard neared the end of his statement and McGrue sensed what was coming, the Irishman's eyes flamed and his ever-ready fists began to close.

Danvers, too, saw what was coming. As the Irishman sprang at him with a Kilkenny yell of fury, the Englishman drew a revolver and fired pointblank. Miraculously he missed McGrue, but his bullet plugged into the left shoulder of the Frenchman, Lefevre, who had been standing behind in the direct line of fire.

The Frenchman went to the ground, coughing and spitting blood, while the infuriated Hibernian fell upon Danvers, wrenched the pistol from his grip and threw it toward McCullough, who pocketed it and stood by as a very partial referee in a fight without rules.

Danvers had science—also a yellow streak. McGrue had neither; but he had also no fear when his blood was up.

The fight ended when McGrue let Danvers stagger drunkenly to his feet. The English embezzler's clothes were in tatters, and his face and hands, bruised and bloody, were plastered with adhering sand. He was a horrible spectacle, and under that half-moon he whined like a hurt dog and begged mercy of Brian McGrue. The McGrue answered him with a kick that sent the human wreck reeling out into the desert night without horse, food or water.

He did not come back. He never turned up in San Rosario. It was only twelve miles, but—*Quien sabe?*

Next night camp was made among the Painted Rocks. There were now only five—a still unrepentant five. Ceballos, a man no longer in his prime, was suffering intensely from his broken wrist. Gallup, ashamed, nursed him as a father might his infant child. Lefevre had sustained a bullet through the apex of his left lung. He was in bad shape, continually expectorating blood and at intervals having hemorrhages. His temperature was dangerously high, and he was rapidly becoming delirious. The only two who seemed comparatively at ease were McCullough and Brian McGrue, although the latter showed various marks of his recent scrimmage with Danvers.

They had turned Danvers' horse loose after taking from it the food and water for horse and man the Englishman had brought along. The horse returned to San Rosario all right, and it was the first hint the colony of moral turpitude had that some tragedy was being enacted out there in the desert. Nobody stirred, however. Nobody cared enough for the supercilious Englishman, who had no better record than the next man but lorded through San Rosario days as if he had.

Even with the added food and water from Danvers' mount the five who camped among the Painted Rocks were ill-provisioned for what was ahead of them; but with all the reckless improvidence of their kind they gave little thought to that phase of the situation, stimulated by the belief that on the morrow they would find the treasure without difficulty and ride back to San Rosario.

* * *

BOTH Ceballos and Lefevre were unable to proceed on the following morning, the former having developed a fever after another sleepless night of pain and Lefevre being quite delirious and still having hemorrhages from the punctured lung. Gallup elected to stay by the sick men, and the other two, exchanging significant glances, commented on his "whiteness" and started forth with Krumholz' compass after closely questioning old Ceballos.

"Five or six miles north—keeping the line—north from Painted Rocks." That was the direction given on the newspaper margin. But had Krumholz said nothing about a sign? A mound or a stone, say—to mark where the little box lay?

"No, *señores*," groaned Ceballos, where he sat nursing his wrist, Gallup watching him with almost boyish concern. "It may be—it is possible—even probable, *señores*, that there is some mark. He would naturally have left something, having buried it in the night. But he did not say. He did not have time, *señores*. The death came *presto!*"

"Tell you what," put in Gallup, whose offense against society had been the acceptance of a doubtful outside fee in a matter of bridge construction and who fled when the bridge went down with an express train; "mount your *caballos* and follow the line as instructed. Ride slow and don't joggle the compass more than you can help. When you've gone about four miles, dismount and make a sand mound; then go on two or three hundred yards and make another; and so on until you are played out.

"You can't expect such luck as to hit the stuff the first day, although, following the line, you may strike some mark Krumholz left. You can't tell. But I'll be on the job with you tomorrow, and we'll complete the mounds over a good two miles. Then, if we've struck nothing, we'll trench the whole line, by ——!

"We can't fail to hit it if you make your line exact to a hair between Painted Rocks and the farthest mound—and don't grudge the ground you cover."

Ten minutes later the Scot and the Irishman, mounted on horses laden with water-bottles and feed, a spade each and Krumholz' compass, sat still for a moment while McCullough watched the needle fluctuate about the big N. of the dial.

"Steady!" he announced.

They started.

Late in the evening they returned, two dispirited men on tired horses. It was a further dispiriting camp to which they came for rest and cheer.

They found Gallup seated among the rocks, his big, bony body crumpled up and his head in his hands. Beside him lay old Ceballos. It was clear that the Spanish *posada*-keeper was in a bad way.

"And how's the Frenchie?" asked McGrue with an attempt at cheer.

Gallup raised a haggard face and nodded toward a mound in the sand a little way out from the rocks.

"About noon," said he. "Hemorrhage—choked up and greased. The buzzards got on Ceballos' nerves. I planted him."

"God!" whispered the Irishman without irreverence.

"*Por el amor de Dios, señores—agua!*" moaned the Spaniard.

Gallup got up, fetched his water-bottle and placed it to the sick man's lips. When Ceballos had drunk, the American shook the canteen at his ear.

"Been feeding him *agua* all day," said he. "Lefevre, too, before he greased. I'm about dry. How about you fellows?"

It developed that McCullough and McGrue had none to spare. They had drunk prodigally during their labors with the spades out there on the blazing desert. Still, there was Lefevre's canteen and the Spaniard's, both half full, to say nothing of that which Danvers had left perforce. This was three quarters full. There were also extra canteens for watering the horses. These they did not touch—yet.

When the water for human use was divided, Gallup, McCullough and McGrue found their canteens fairly well replenished, the American coming in for the larger share because he proposed to continue nursing the *posada*-keeper, who was, after all, captain of the expedition.

Then, while they prepared a meal of canned meat, Gallup inquired of the luck. The Celts had no particularly cheering news, but they had made the line, raised the little mound marks over two miles and proved the line by making a compass sight back from the farthest mound to Painted Rocks.

"Well, that's good enough," said Gallup. "Tomorrow the game is to begin in the middle of the line and trench both ways, link by link."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed the Irishman. "Do yez say we're t' dig a trinch two miles long out in that blisterin' disirt?"

"Twa mile!" muttered the Scot.

"I don't expect you'll have to," said Gallup. "Just keep in mind—it'll cheer you up—that every upturn of the spade may show the loot. You may strike it first crack out of the box."

"And we may nut!" said the Scot. "But ye hae the right view-p'int—Ah'll say that for ye."

McGrue muttered something and then fell to eating in silence. Ceballos dropped off in an uneasy sleep. The moon, slightly larger than on the previous night, came up and bathed the desert in a yellow light. The silence got on the nerves of the three.

"Whut d'ye say," suddenly said McGrue, "if we lay off all av the morrow an' do the shovelin' by moonlight?"

"Huh!" grunted the Scot approvingly.

"It's a fairly good idea," said Gallup, "but we can't afford the loss of time. We expected to be back in Rosario inside of forty-eight hours or little more. As it is, we're short of feed and wet for ourselves and the *caballos*. It can't be done, unless——"

"Huh?" grunted the Scot interrogatively.

"Unless one of us agrees to ride into San Rosario for more water and provisions, taking Ceballos in, too. He's not fit."

"Do as ye plaze about that, Misther Gallup," said McGrue doggedly, "but, as long's there's a drap of wather in my canteen—I stay!"

And therewith they fell to bickering. The American, who at first had been willing to trust the others and himself take in Ceballos, suddenly changed his mind. If any one was to go in, they would draw lots for it. But there was little sense in that, either, when presently Ceballos himself, jealous for his share in the possible proceeds of the enterprise, absolutely refused to be taken in. He denied that his broken wrist was more serious than painful. To prove it, he suddenly got up and made a brave effort to appear quite himself, talking vivaciously, although occasionally his sentences broke off in a gasp of pain.

"As for the *caballos*," said he at the end of something like a rapid-fire oration in Latin-American Spanish, "shoot them, *señores*, and save the *agua*."

"B' jabers," said the Irishman, "we don't need thim at that. 'Tis only thirty mile from Painted Rocks. Save the *caballos'* wet for ourselves, an' we can still make it on foot. The little box won't overburden us a bit!"

"But what for wad ye shoot the puir beasts?" the Scot asked.

"Better, maybe," said Gallup, "than that the poor brutes should die by degrees."

There was a long pause of indetermination. It was the Scot who spoke next.

"Is it decidit, then, that we get rid o' the *caballos?"*

There was silence. McCullough got to his feet, picking up a quirt as he did so. Danvers' Colt dangled at his belt. He disappeared among the rocks, in a hollow of which the animals were hobbled. Two, at least, of the remaining three strained their ears for shots. None came, but in a little while McCullough returned and threw down the quirt.

"That's settled," said he. "They're hauf-way hame by noo if a quirt could inflooence their guid judgement. An' noo, may the Lord in heev'n help us if we dinna find that wee box *muy pronto!"*

* * *

NEXT morning McCullough and McGrue traveled afoot to the mounds and resumed their labors. Gallup remained with Ceballos, who had collapsed after his brave effort to reassert his captaincy. Two hours later Gallup, who had been brooding over matters, yielded to the promptings of the demon suspicion. Without a word to the Spaniard, he abandoned the latter to his own best devices and followed on the trail of the Celts. The same demon of suspicion whispered in Ceballos' ear; and, when he finally realized where and why the American had gone, he, too, staggered out over the blazing desert toward the scene of operations.

He got there, but that was about all. His face crimson, his eyes wild and his legs wabbling under him, he suddenly appeared among the three who were digging the north and south line and fell headlong into the trench.

He was senseless when they examined him. Gallup forced a little water between his teeth and let it go at that. McCullough and McGrue paid not the slightest attention.

For a strange madness had fallen upon all three. Their eyes were wild, and they glanced curiously sidelong at one another. They labored like galley-slaves under the lash, and, every time one of them struck something more solid than sand—a stone or a bone—he grabbed it and faced the other two with blood in his eye.

When the sun went down and the moon came up, they threw down their spades and collected sense enough to agree that the store of food and water should be brought from Painted Rocks to the trench. This was done, all three making the ten-mile tramp—five miles each way—through the heavy sand, leaving Ceballos where he had fallen. When they returned, they drank some water, each jealously taking gulp for gulp with the others—lest the others should later demand a share of the greater remainder. Then, after bolting some canned meat, each literally fell in his tracks and slept the sleep of the unjust.

* * *

ON THE fifth day out from San Rosario, while Gallup, McCullough and McGrue still labored on the lengthening trench between the mounds, the *posada*-keeper, Ceballos, died of fever, hunger, thirst and general exhaustion. His death was unnoted at first by all but the buzzards, whose gathering presence led to a suspension of labors while a shallow grave was dug.

And the sun went down on that fifth day without glinting on the facets of a single diamond.

On the sixth day their situation was precarious. The water was in the bottom of the canteens and gone bad. The food was finished—at least all that had been designed for human consumption. Yet mutual suspicion and the still unabated belief that the treasure was within easy reach usurped common sense even then.

It was Gallup, urged by the gnawing behind his belt-buckle, who suddenly threw down his spade and started at a long but unsteady gait toward Painted Rocks. For a drink of clean, cool water he would have sold his soul; for a meal of anything he would willingly have bartered his prospective share of the Krumholz diamonds. For he had no illusions about what would happen if the two rogues who still labored in the sand uncovered the little box in his absence.

He reached Painted Rocks and found remnants of what he sought. The horses' feed-bags were torn and empty. Not even a grain of corn! Bird or beast had been ahead of him. Possibly the horses, wandering in search of food and water, had come back. . . .

Gallup sat down among the rocks and gave up. His elbows on his knees, his hands covering his face, he reflected on what fools some men can be.

He did not see the thing. It rippled out sinuously from a crevice of the rocks. There came a curious buzzing sound, and, as he started to his feet, the thing struck.

BACK in the trench the two Celts still labored, their lips black, their mouths open, their breath coming in hoarse gasps, their scarlet faces dry, the skin drawn tight over their cheek-bones.

All at once the Irishman, McGrue, straightened up and looked sharply to the north and then toward Painted Rocks. He was not thinking of the missing Gallup just then, but of something quite remote from mortality. Presently he sat down on the edge of the trench, tried to wet his lips with his tongue and made a ghastly attempt at a grin. A queer chuckle came from his throat, whereat McCullough stopped shoveling and glared at him suspiciously. McGrue still grinned like a death's-head.

"Yo're holdin' out somethin', ye Irish blaggard!" cried the Scot hoarsely.

"I am not," said the Irishman in a husky whisper, still grinning.

"Yo're lyin'!" yelled McCullough. "Yo've found it—the wee box!"

The right hand of the Scot flew to his hip. But the Irishman, alert, was quicker. With the almost simultaneous double shot McCullough crumpled up in the trench, while McGrue, still grinning, wiped a streak of blood from a furrowed neck.

Five minutes later McGrue had unearthed the remains of Ceballos from the shallow grave. From a pocket of the dead *posada*-keeper's clothes he extracted two things—the scrap of newspaper margin and the compass. They had had no further use or thought for them when they buried the unfortunate Spaniard.

Then, throwing a few shovels of sand over that which had been Ceballos and indifferently stepping over the body of the Scot, Brian McGrue climbed out of the trench and staggered away toward Painted Rocks. As he neared the color-streaked outcropping, he drew his revolver and advanced cautiously.

But when he came upon something that might have been Gallup yet did not look like him, so had the venom worked, he shoved the pistol in its holster and stared.

"Christ!" he whispered to skies that were vacant save for hovering vultures. "An', if I find it, it's mine—all mine, b' jabers!" He reeled slightly and clapped a hand to his throbbing brow. "Howly Moses! If I had jist a lick av wather."

He pulled himself together. He had a task before him requiring wits—also a test of endurance. He left the rocks and stood upon the desert sand, facing north. The sun was casting long afternoon shadows. Carefully he laid the compass at his feet and turned it until the needle rested steadily along the heavy black arrow line pointing to N.

Next, with even more deliberate care, he moved the compass around until the needle rested near, but not quite on, the lighter-shaded arrow pointing to 20° W. He had a vague idea that the magnetic variation in this region was somewhere around 15°.

"And he buried it by night—by night, he towld Ceballos," he muttered.

When the needle rested on 15° W., he started to walk slowly, unsteadily, out into the desert.

NIGHT, dropping like a mantle at about six in the evening, gave place presently to the yellow light of full moon on the desert.

Time and again Brian McGrue halted, his head swimming from constant staring—not at the needle deflected by the magnetic lode but at the heavy black arrow which pointed due north. His every muscle ached from the strain of walking slowly, without staggering, in order to keep his course to a hair. He was suffering agonies of hunger and thirst. His strength was at its lowest, its ebb stayed only by his will to win to the end.

Then, when he had cleared his brain by looking far and wide at the desert's face and the blue dome starred with diamonds of flame, he pressed on again slowly, reeling or stumbling at intervals, but keeping his line 15° to the right of the needle point.

Once about midnight, when he paused thus, he saw, low on the horizon, the Big Dipper and Polaris. The sight of the latter rearoused his determination. The heavy arrow pointed almost dead upon it.

But at a later stop the madness that had held him doggedly on his course left his brain for a moment. And in that moment he saw the odds against him.

Could he reach the goal? His aching body, throbbing temples, vacuous stomach and gummed lips argued against it. Reaching somewhere near the spot, could he find the treasure? The desert whispered, and the whisper seemed a chuckle. And, if he found it—there were thirty-five miles of desert between him and a drop of water.

For a while sanity sat in despair, yet counseling. Then insanity usurped the seat and with mad optimism told him pleasant lies. Find the little box, and all would be well! The diamonds would be as food and drink, reviving his strength by the promise of a life of pleasure and ease, so that he would make light of those trivial thirty-five miles of desert.

About one o'clock in the morning, while the great moon blazed upon the yellow, arid waste, McGrue fell into a sleep of exhaustion where he had intended to rest only a few minutes. When he awoke, the moon was a pale orb to the west. In the east a golden glare announced sunrise.

McGrue sat up with a groan. His limbs, shoulders and neck were stiff and ached horribly. His tongue was dry and tough as a baked gizzard. He imagined, before memory reestablished things, that he had been on a drunk somewhere on the previous night.

He was oddly dazed as if his brain were partially paralyzed, but he had common sense enough to realize that it would be wise to push on before the sun grew high and hot.

Again he balanced the needle on 15° W. and tried to make a fresh start. The moment he stood up, he fell down. Twice —thrice he tried to keep his feet, but his head swam, and the sand miraculously rose to meet his face.

The fighting Irish boiled up in him. His bloodshot eyes blazed, and he snarled through his teeth:

"B' jabers! If I can't walk, I'll crawl!" And he did.

UNDER the torrid, blinding sun of noon a pitiable object dragged itself forward like some giant lizard, mortally hurt.

McGrue's face was the color of a broiled crab, and his eyes, blinded by white light, salt tears and sweat, peered out from swollen lids over cheeks that were bloated by fly-bites.

About a half mile to his left—so had the course varied—was the line of mounds. A flock of buzzards over there informed him—as far as his brain was capable of being informed of anything—that he was opposite the middle of the tentative line where they had been digging.

If his theory was correct—that Krumholz, burying his treasure by night, had not used the compass but traveled on a line between Painted Rocks and the Pole star, nearly due north and from 12° to 15° east of the magnetic lode—then he must now be in the vicinity of the little box.

He raised himself to the height of his arms, after vain attempts to stand up, and peered through half-blinded eyes at the sand around him. Then he collapsed on his face, his arms stretched out and his hands gripping the loose, dry sand, which promptly percolated through his fingers.

He had seen nothing but an unknown waste of wind-blown sand. A hot breeze blew it up in eddying spirals. And that was what hurt. Krumholz, in all reason, must have left a mark to guide himself back to that treasure; but long since, no doubt, the wind-blown sands had covered that mark, unless. . . .

And again hope revived, and the fighting Irish blood responded to the call. He noticed that several buzzards, attracted by the crawling thing on the desert's face, had left the center of attraction over in the trench between the mounds and were now making an aerial reconnoiter over him. But he only laughed and cursed the buzzards and began again his snail-like forward movement.

For this was the new hope—that the wind might as well have uncovered the little box as buried the mark!

But about three in the afternoon endurance reached its limit. Brian McGrue's body relaxed and his head fell to the sand with his face turned sideways. His eyes closed, and he became still.

But the buzzards did not alight. They knew.

The mounds to the west were making long shadows when he again partly recovered consciousness. He could not move. A not unpleasant languor lay upon him. He wondered if he were dead. Somewhere in the air he heard beautiful voices singing in exquisite harmonies. He was no longer hungry or thirsty. He had no body. Only a certain consciousness of being remained.

He lay for a long time just as he had fallen into insensibility, just as he had returned to partial sensibility. His eyes gazed vacantly at the sand directly beside his face and were fixed for some time upon a short, narrow strip of brown projecting from the sand—quite some time before the significance of the thing penetrated his still lingering consciousness.

It was a leather strap.

The thing did not excite him; he was beyond that. Mildly it interested and amused him as some unusual object does a child.

After a while he moved forward an arm that seemed leaden and lifeless. His fingers closed upon the strap and drew feebly upon it. Nothing followed.

Slowly the nerveless fingers drew away the sand from around the half-buried leather. The rusted top of a canteen came into view.

It was then that the last recrudescence of strength surged through Brian McGrue. With a mighty effort he rolled over so that he brought both hands to bear upon the object. Slowly he unearthed it—a canteen, heavy as with water.

Water!

A queer guttural croak that had some joy in it came from his throat. Fumbling, he unscrewed the top and placed the canteen to his lips, lying flat on his back.

From the mouth of the canteen spouted a stream, glittering in the rays of the setting sun, rippling over his face and twinkling like dewdrops in the sand.

But his tongue knew no sensation of moisture. With a childishly puzzled expression on his face, he rolled over and spat from his mouth several of the shimmering drops.

Then he knew. He had found the little box, or that which Krumholz had substituted for greater security.

"B' jabers!" whispered Brian McGrue, staring wild-eyed at the brazen sky. "B' jabers! I'm rich!"

The buzzards circled lower.

YUMA TOWN

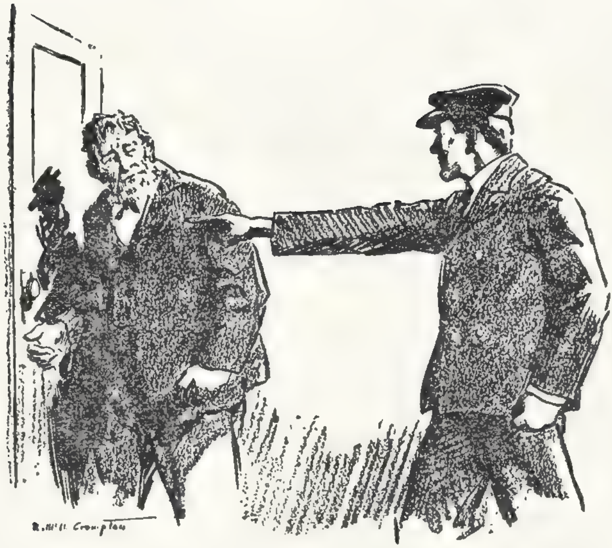
by GEORGE GATLIN

I WANT to go back to Yuma town,
Where painted desert and mountains call,
Riding again through the desert hills
As the purple shadows fall.

I left a horse with a squatter there,
Winner in many a rodeo list,
High-strung, bottom, sense and looks,
And a leg like a woman's wrist.

I left a girl in the blue foothills,
Wonder of women, child of the sun,
And many an evening she rode with me,
Night-herding stars when the day was done.

I want to go back to Yuma town,
Not lured as once by desert gold,
But seeking three things I left out there,
A girl, a horse, and a rider's soul.



ON ONE WAVE

by HUGH S. FULLERTON

Author of "Cassiday's Consolation Kick," "Throw It Over on John Lund," etc.

THERE was trouble breeding on the *Cherigoo* and weather breeding on Lake Michigan. One who had "ridden the boats" long could sense the trouble in the way in which the petty officers attempted to act as if everything were as usual. Almost any one could have sensed the fact that weather was threatening.

It was September, and we were on the down trip, two hours late. Big Point Sable light shone peat-fire red through the heat haze which still clung close in shore, although a mile out the wind, which had risen, fallen to dead calms, shifted suddenly and blown from all the points of the compass, had swept away the heavy fogs that had helped delay the *Cherigoo* on the up trip. A heavy swell was on the lake, showing distant wind-pressure from the southwest. The wind, blowing from north now, met the swell and stirred up a nasty, choppy sea.

Four hundred resorters, homeward bound from Summer playgrounds amid the dunes, the lakes and the islands of the Straits country, nearly all had disappeared into their staterooms before dinner was served in Portage Lake. Therefore, Jimmy, the steward, usually philosophic, grieved and swore. Preparing to serve four hundred dinners and having a scant fifty guests did not tend to make him sympathize with the seasick ones.

Something was wrong. Something had been wrong ever since we left Chicago the preceding evening. It started when Dan, the veteran chief engineer, had been seized with illness half an hour before sailing time and young Jim Wattrous had been taken off a freight boat and put in charge of the big engines of the *Cherigoo*. The Old Man had ordered Wattrous to take the engines, and the Old Man had blundered. He had forgotten in his anxiety over Dan's illness and the haste to find a chief on short notice that Jim Wattrous was Captain Joe's son-in-law and that Captain Joe never had forgiven Wattrous for eloping with his daughter Jennie, his only child.

The Old Man was commodore of the line and principal owner. Captain Joe had been his mate when the Old Man commanded the only vessel the company owned. They had been bunk-mates before that and later had commanded sister boats. Captain Joe was master of the *Cherigoo* and had been her captain from the day she came off the ways as the finest boat of the growing line.

Ordering Wattrous aboard the *Cherigoo* was bad enough, but, after he had sent the order, the Old Man had remembered the feud between the men and had made matters more embarrassing by deciding at the last minute to come aboard himself.

"The Old Man is getting old," the steward had confided to me. "If he had stuck in the office, Captain Joe and Wattrous would have been so polite to each other you'd have thought they hadn't been introduced. But the Old Man will try so hard to make peace that there'll be trouble, sure."

Captain Joe had received without a word the news that Wattrous would have charge of the engines. Only a quick outthrusting of his jaw had betrayed his surprize and resentment. He laid the course, ordered the new chief to turn a hundred and three through the night and addressed the necessary orders with painful formality. Thereafter he ignored his son-in-law entirely. But the Old Man irritated him.

"Say!" the steward remarked as we sat in his cabin. "The Old Man is mussing up the cards. He is doing things here that he would throw any one into the lake for doing if he was captain—and he don't know it. That 'blessed is the peacemaker' dope is all wrong. Both sides want to take a poke at him. I wish he would go to bed."

At the turn of the screw Captain Joe had ordered, we were due at Ludington at six o'clock. A heavy fog blanketed the coast at sunrise. We turned to make the entrance; the engine-room bells rang sharply; we dropped to quarter speed and felt our way. The *Cherigoo* had missed the entrance. While we felt along shore and found the channel, Captain Joe went around with grim face and the Old Man fussed, trying to place the blame on something besides the engines. We all knew that during the night the set speed had not been maintained—and that Captain Joe blamed Wattrous.

While we unloaded freight, Captain Joe kept his eyes averted. Wattrous had gone ashore the moment the engines stopped. We knew that he expected his wife to greet him at the dock. His home was in Ludington, and we knew he had sent a wireless message to her announcing his change of vessels and time of arrival. Captain Joe must have known of the fact, but he kept his eyes averted from that part of the dock and watched the freight. Wattrous' wife was not there, and, after he had telephoned to his home, he returned with worried countenance to his engines.

The fog was thick as soup leaving Ludington. It lifted for a few minutes and settled heavier than ever before we passed Big Point. The *Cherigoo* missed the river mouth at Manistee by half a mile. After feeling the way into the channel through the dense fog, Captain Joe descended to the engine-room.

"What were you turning, Chief?" he inquired, his polite words masked in bitter tones.

"She marked ninety-seven coming up, but she didn't make it, sir."

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Is that the kind of steamboating they teach at them —— colleges?"

That was all, but Wattrous went white and bit his lip to keep from making an angry retort.

The words sounded harmless enough, but back of them was the entire history of the feud between Captain Joe and Wattrous.

Captain Joe had taken Wattrous when he was a boy to break him in on the boats. Three years Wattrous had served, saved his money and then announced he was going to school to study marine engineering. Captain Joe, with the bigotry of the old-school sailor, was wounded in his pride. He scoffed at the idea that a school could teach as much engineering or seamanship as could be learned under him in service. They had quarreled, and it was because of that quarrel that Captain Joe had ordered his daughter to break with Wattrous—which order resulted in the young couple eloping the year after Wattrous won his second engineer's license. Captain Joe's anger over the delay was less than his gloating over the discomfiture of Wattrous in his first handling of big passenger engines. His tone was a sneer of triumph.

Conditions aboard the *Cherigoo* were promising for more trouble when she started on the down trip. The Old Man, by his efforts to prevent trouble, made it worse. He became irritable and nervous, and at every landing he had been giving orders regarding freight handling and stops. He ordered the return stop at Portage cut out and left half a load of fruit on the landing-stage at Onekema, declaring that it was necessary for him to be at his desk in Chicago the next morning. Twice he had descended to the engine-room and scolded at Wattrous for not making better time. Wattrous, his nerves raw from the trials of the day, had exploded on the third visit.

"Get out of here!" he said angrily. "I take orders from the captain. I'm getting everything out of this old scow that she'll give me with two leaks and rotten coal, and you can't give orders here if you own the whole —— lake."

Angry and red with the guilty knowledge that he was wrong and Wattrous right, the owner retreated, vowing vengeance and at the same time seeking sympathy.

"Joe," he said to the captain, "that educated idiot down there told me—me, you understand—to get to —— out of his engine-room or he'd throw me out."

He expected the captain at least to sympathize. Instead, Joe turned on him with a snarl.

"What were you doing down there?" he demanded. "Giving orders? Then, by ——, he ought to have thrown you out. I'm captain of this boat, and neither you nor any other man can give orders aboard her."

"Why—why—why, you old fool, what do you mean, talking to me like that? Wait until I'm on the dock at Chicago——"

"I'll be there," said Captain Joe grimly as he turned and walked away.

The Old Man, still blinking, retreated to the steward's cabin and sought solace in Jimmy's company and a big glass of grog.

"By the big run of whitefish in Betsy Bay," he swore his favorite oath, "that old fool took advantage of me—waited until he knew I was wrong and then called me when I was trying to help him. When we get to Chicago, by sturgeon and small yaller perch, I'll tell him who runs this line if I have to raise his salary afterwards."

WHEN the Old Man started swearing by the fish of the lake, he was getting exasperated, and Jimmy had to disappear to hide a laugh. After that the three belligerents kept apart—Captain Joe moving from post to post with a grim and determined face, the Old Man fuming and fretting in the steward's cabin, and Wattrous sticking to his engines as he had done all night and all day, save for brief naps when they were running smoothly.

The red light on Big Point Sable dimmed and the lights at the end of the great piers of the breakwater guarding Ludington harbor rose ahead. The wind had veered—first westerly, then to southwest—and was blowing harder. The chop of the waves had been wiped out by the weight of the big rollers that increased in size. Over the bars the surf was breaking high.

The approach to the river's mouth or channel which leads from the lake to the inner lake at Ludington is a perilous place. Ludington harbor is at the center of a wide bay guarded by Big and Little Points Sable, and stretched like the strings of a harp across this bay are bars of shifting sand. Until the huge breakwater system was built to guard the inner harbor, Ludington landing was one of the terrors of lake navigation.

On this night the quadruple line of bars marked the dark stormy water with long lines of white as the surf broke high upon them. The *Cherigoo* held its course until it seemed to pass the mouth of the harbor. Then with a sudden turn, followed by three minutes of sickening lurching and wallowing, the boat slipped through the entrance between the great piers and into the quiet waters of the channel. The wind howled through the upper works with increasing strength as she passed into the smaller lake, maneuvered delicately in the shallow waters and slid alongside the pier.

The rattle of trucks, the crash of incoming freight and the shouts of the stevedores replaced the smash of heavy seas and the pounding of the engines. No sooner were the planks out than the Old Man sprang ashore and commenced giving orders to the freight handlers. Here, at least, he was in charge, and he gave commands in a loud voice as if seeking to provoke a renewal of the argument. Captain Joe, silent and grim, ignored him entirely and after a brief word to his mate walked aft and stood scanning the skies toward the southwest. Wattrous had gone ashore and hurried to the telephone in the freight office. Five minutes later he returned to his engines, looking worried and anxious.

Under the driving of the Old Man, the freight was discharged and received in forty minutes. Nass, the mate, watching the last of the fish boxes rushing inboard, shouted—

"All on, sir."

Captain Joe acknowledged the report with a short nod, turned and walked along the second deck and stood for several minutes surveying the skies. The waters of the inner lake, usually quiet under the protection of the dunes, were lashed into white by the wind, which forced up the waves and blew their crests away in a mist of spindrift. The great car ferries, lashed in their slips, strained until the heavy hawsers whined. The upper tiers of a lumber-pile in a yard near-by were picked up and scattered like jackstraws over the face of the water. The tall Lombardy poplars on the dunes waved and cracked like whip-lashes.

Captain Joe walked back along the deck and looked down.

"All right, Nass!" he called. "Make her fast!"

Wattrous, who had emerged from the engine-room, was standing near me.

"Thank God," he said.

He started to his cabin to change clothes.

The Old Man, standing on the dock and waiting impatiently for the whistle to sound the order to cast off, did not hear Captain Joe's order but saw Nass starting to obey the command.

"What are you doing, Nass?" he demanded.

"Tying up for the night, sir, Cap'n's orders."

Sheltered as he was between the vessel and the freight house, the Old Man did not realize the full force of the wind.

"Tying her up?" he bellowed angrily. "Tie up and lose half a trip for a little cap of wind? Leave those ropes inboard. I order her to sail."

Captain Joe had descended to the freight-deck and heard the words.

"I ordered her tied up," he said.

"And I order her to sail," the Old Man blustered. "I'm owner and on shore. You can boss me around and make a fool of me on board, but you take my orders now."

"There are four hundred passengers—" Captain Joe had controlled his anger with an effort—"and the wind is rising——"

"No wonder those resorters call you the most careful captain on the lake," the Old Man snorted. "Tie up the biggest boat on the line to save a lot of school-marms from being seasick. When I was master of a boat half this size, a little wind didn't keep us in harbor. Have you lost your nerve?"

Captain Joe winced as if he had been struck. He stood glaring at the Old Man for half a minute. Then he turned to Nass.

"Mate," he said, "get the planks in, close everything tight below and set the deck-hands lashing freight and furniture."

He turned to the Old Man.

"Coming aboard, sir? Or will you take the train?"

The Old Man quivered with rage at the insult. He leaped aboard, his hands clenched, his face working with anger. For an instant it looked as if he would attack Captain Joe, who turned away without further notice of the owner. At the foot of the stairway he met Wattrous, dressed in his shore clothes, hurrying toward the plank.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, his pent-up anger toward the Old Man loosed upon the engineer.

"I thought we were tied up. I was going home."

"Oh," snarled the captain. "I thought maybe you put on those clothes to go to college and take another lesson in engineering."

"You're not taking her out?" Wattrous' voice was beseeching. "I—I hoped——"

"You hoped what?"

"Why I—that is, Jennie——"

Captain Joe's face hardened at the mention of his daughter.

"If you're afraid," he sneered, "I'll put Duggan at the engines."

"You wouldn't say that to me ashore," Wattrous said, his eyes narrowing dangerously.

"Get to your engines," Captain Joe ordered.

"Say!" said Jimmy the steward to me. "Ain't it —— the way trouble passes itself along? Next thing you know I'll ask you whether you're afraid, and you'll bust me in the eye."

The *Cherigoo* backed slowly out of the slip. The wind, catching the upper works with full force, drifted her out of the channel. Twice she maneuvered to turn before she straightened away. In the channel leading to the big lake, the wind listed her and drove her sidewise until it seemed that she would scrape against the north breakwater.

The force of the wind was terrific. Water, forced by the weight of the waves outside, was driven up the narrow channel until it dammed the descending river water and deepened the lake. On the dunes the trees swayed until their branches flailed the earth. Sand filled the air and whipped across the deck of the vessel like stinging sleet.

"It's a God's mercy all them schoolma'ams is sick tonight," said Jimmy. "They're too sick to yell and bother me, and they won't care whether they drown or not."

As we passed outside, the full force of the hurricane caught the *Cherigoo*. She quivered violently under the pile-driver blows of the waves. The waves made a curtain of white water high above the twelve-foot breakwater. Wind-driven water was breaking over the lights at the harbor entrance, dimming them. The bars were quadruple lines of crashing white water, and the break in these lines marked the channel.

Captain Joe had gone to the pilot-house and taken the wheel. The helmsman gave way to him and stood peering over his shoulder. Past two of the bars he nursed the lurching, wallowing vessel, holding her in the narrow way of safety against the fury of the wind and the crushing power of the sea.

At the third a great wave lifted the *Cherigoo*—raised her high. Then the water seemed to fall away from under her, and she dropped as into a well. She hit the bar with a jolt that seemed to break her and start every timber in her solid frame. For an instant she hung; then, staggering, lurching, she lifted on the next wave, struck the solid sand again and fought her way clear. By a supreme effort Captain Joe kept her from falling off sidewise and held her nose into the seas. As she righted, he swung her back into the channel, rang for full speed and cleared the fourth bar.

Inside the staterooms, prayers, cries, screams, groans and pleadings added to the din. On the freight-deck men raced and dodged death, striving to lash the boxes and barrels that had torn from their fastenings and were sliding and bounding across the open spaces. An automobile, torn loose, raced back and forth, crashing against one wall and then the other until it turned turtle and was tied fast. Boxes leaped and glided; crates of fruit spun and slid across decks and collapsed in mashed messes.

The dining-room furniture played shuttlecock and battledore with the staterooms. The piano in the grand saloon overturned and slid aft, sweeping away settees and tumbling into quietude when it lodged in the grand stairway. In the galley and the pantries broken china and battered pans and pots added to the din that rose above the scream of the hurricane, the crash of waves and the racing of the screw, which on every third and seventh wave lifted clear of the water and whirled free.

THE Old Man had joined Jimmy and me in the steward's cabin and was striving to conceal his regret.

"Jimmy," he said, suddenly enraged, "if you don't quit humming 'Home, Sweet Home,' I'll kill you."

Jimmy grinned cheerfully.

"I was just thinking," he said, "that this breeze will break the hot spell."

"Worst is over now," said the Old Man, talking to keep up courage. "This'll blow itself out soon. I've seen worse nights than this on this lake."

"Chances are you won't see another worse one," said Jimmy cheeringly. "Just my luck—my wife's so jealous she'll be sore because I get drowned with so many pretty schoolma'ams."

The *Cherigoo*, instead of foundering, battled its way outward into the open lake, wallowing forward in a smother of giant seas, quivering from wave-shocks which succeeded each other at regular intervals. In the engine-room Wattrous was working desperately, striving to calculate the big waves and to ease the screw when it raced, for fear it would snap off and leave us at the mercy of the storm.

An hour passed. At first we had waited, expecting momentarily that the next shock would be the final one. But with delay the shocks ceased to bring the involuntary nerve spasms that they had done.

"I'm beginning to take interest in ham and eggs," said Jimmy. "For a while I lost interest in breakfast or figured we'd be eating angel food."

He went to work at his books, leaving me to loll in his bunk and listen to the optimistic words of the Old Man, who was more cheering even if not convincing.

"Say!" Jimmy said fifteen minutes later, "Wattrous certainly is handling those old engines. Listen to them. They haven't raced the screw for ten minutes."

Just then Captain Joe entered the stateroom.

"Steward," he said, "take a club and quiet those dining-room niggers. They're scared white."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy, seizing a hickory club.

Captain Joe turned to go. Just outside the door he met Wattrous. The engineer's face was gray from weariness and drawn with exertion and lack of sleep. Streaks of grease and soot gave him a terrifying appearance. His teeth were clenched, and his cheeks quivered with some strong emotion.

"Sir," he said shortly, "I have to report that, at the rate we are burning fuel, the coal will not last four hours."

"We took on coal at Manistee." Captain Joe's tone was one of alarm mingled with doubt.

"No, sir. I thought it was, but it was left on the dock at Manistee. I just discovered that."

His eyes fixed themselves on the Old Man. Captain Joe turned toward the owner and stood looking at him steadily. Not a word escaped his lips.

Suddenly the Old Man collapsed.

"Joe," he said contritely, "Joe, I'm a meddling old fool."

He sank down upon a chair. For an instant no one moved. Then Captain Joe's hand reached out and rested upon the shoulder of his old friend.

"That's all right, Robert," he said. "Can't be helped now."

"Steward," he added, turning to Jimmy, "how are your passengers?"

"Alive and groaning," said Jimmy.

"See to them," said Captain Joe shortly. "Tell the boys on the freight-deck to keep clear. You fellows watch out for flying stuff. Don't get any legs or arms broken. We may need every man later."

"What are you going to do, Joe?" asked the Old Man, thoroughly subdued and humble.

"Turn her and run for Ludington."

"My God, man! You can't turn a boat in this sea," cried the Old Man, springing to his feet in expostulation. "There isn't a boat on the lake that could live two minutes in the trough tonight. It can't be done. Hold her head up into it and wait until this blows out."

"This wind will hold beyond noon," said Captain Joe. "I'm going to turn her."

"Man, you'll drown us all. I forbid you to try it."

A faint flicker of a smile passed across Captain Joe's face.

"We're on the lake now," he said meaningly. "Chief," he added, turning to Wattrous, "how are your engines?"

"Behaving better since Manistee, sir."

"You've handled them well." The compliment came with a visible effort. "Stand by them. When I give you one bell, give her everything she's got and keep driving her until I give you the bell again."

Without another word he turned and went upward toward the pilot-house.

THERE are moments in a man's life when every sensation registers indelibly. This was one of them. There were five of us after the steward hastened away to warn the deck-hands to seek safety. What the others were thinking, I do not know, but my own thoughts were a medley. The idea that in a minute or two I might be drowning seemed less important than the thought that I must get behind something solid to avoid flying objects.

The Old Man, cursing himself steadily, sat down in a camp-stool and clenched its sides firmly with both hands. Martin, the cabin watch, stood beside me, both of us holding to the balustrade. The purser held both arms around the newel post. I found myself perspiring and envying the persons in the staterooms who were unconscious of the coming crisis. The purser was craning his neck, his head turned as if listening. His lips moved. He was counting.

"He'll wait for the seventh— " he started to say.

Then the shock came. It was as a fast train crashing against a granite cliff. The ship seemed to stop. The tremendous crash seemed to pound her sides in. Everything movable inside the hull was catapulted across the vessel, crashing against solid hull or battering in stateroom doors. Screams, shrieks, wild cries of terror arose. The *Cherigoo* lurched, listed until her second-deck rails were in the water. Cataracts poured down the stairways and deluged us. The Old Man, still clinging to his stool, catapulted into the berth in the steward's cabin and swore frightfully as the water raced down the tilted floor and smothered his oaths.

Then, in less time than it can be told, the *Cherigoo* rose like a dog coming from water, shook herself, righted and on even keel fled before the wind and sea toward safety.

I opened my eyes. The Old Man was sitting up in the water-logged berth, his jaw dropped, his face a study in amazement.

"Turned her!" he said as if doubting his own senses. "Turned her on one wave, by ——!"

Ten minutes later Captain Joe descended from the pilot-house. His face was expressionless, calm.

"How are your passengers, Steward?" he inquired.

"One broken arm, one smashed foot, fourteen waiters going to quit when we get to port and the rest thankful, sir."

Wattrous appeared from below.

"Engines all right, Chief?"

"One loose bed-plate, but the bolts held, sir."

"You handled her well on the turn, boy." Captain Joe's tone was an apology.

"Thank you, sir," said Wattrous. "You see, sir, I was anxious to get back—Jennie was expecting the baby tonight——"

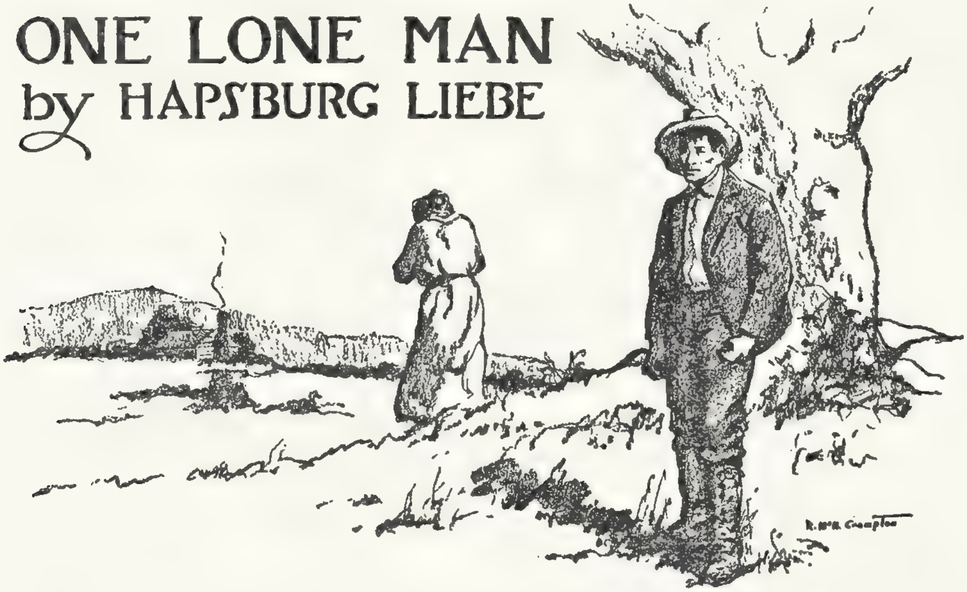
"Why didn't you tell me at Ludington?" demanded the Old Man. "Then I wouldn't have been fool enough to order Joe to sail."

Captain Joe's face changed.

"Son," he said simply, putting his hand on Wattrous' shoulder, "I understand now. Go drive the engines hard. I'm in a hurry to get back, too. I want to see my grandson."

ONE LONE MAN

by HAPSBURG LIEBE



Author of "Alias John Doe," "Baltimore Bill," etc.

TOM REAGLE was his name. Nobody remembered him when he stepped from a train at Jamesville's weatherbeaten little railway station. Nobody noticed that his high-laced boots were gray from mildew and age or that his corduroy clothing and his blue flannel shirt and his broad-rimmed hat were moth-eaten and full of rumples and wrinkles—because those who saw him saw only his face. It was a lean and intelligent face. It was striking because of its bright light of hope and gladness and because of its invincible strength. Tom Reagle, "Copperhead," was tall, as rangy as a blue-grass horse, as straight as a rosemary pine and twenty-nine years old.

He paused for a moment at the station, and that bare moment he spent in devouring with his gaze the long, dim-blue ranges of mountains that lay a few miles to the eastward. It would have been worse than effeminate, to him, had he stretched out his arms toward those mountains; therefore he at once put down his impulsive desire to do that. Then he strode straight toward the east, crossing vacant lots and wide fields, ignoring all paths and roads; the shortest way to the dim-blue ranges was much too long.

When he reached the foot-hills, the sun had set. Three hours later he stood on the pine-fringed crest of the majestic Big Laurel. The moon had come up as if it wished to be the first to welcome him to his old homeland, and Tom Reagle waved his hand at that old home moon as he would have waved his hand at a tried and true friend.

"One more big hill, only one more," he said joyously to himself; and his native drawl was nowhere in evidence.

He still used more or less of his native dialect, but his drawl was gone forever. Eight years must change a man a little in one way or in another.

The valley that lay between him and the Little Laurel—a mountain that, by the way, was considerably greater than the one he stood on—was wide and deep. It was not far from midnight when he reached the center of this valley, and the prospect of climbing the rugged, cliff-lined steep that rose ahead of him was not alluring. He was dead-tired, dog-tired, and he succumbed to the temptation to sit down on the leaves and rest.

Then he slowly stretched himself out there on the bank of Big Laurel Creek among the fragrant ferns and wild columbine.

The blended odors of the early Summer's wild flowers were heavy on the soft night air. His eyelids drooped. He slept and dreamed once more of home, the loved old home, and of his mother and of Alice, Alice. . . .

Tom Reagle's father had nicknamed him Copperhead because his hair was almost auburn; the other Reagles had black hair. Copperhead had just finished doing a term of eight eternities of years in the penitentiary at Nashville, a thing few mountain-born men may hope to outlive. He had not been guilty of manslaughter. The net which circumstance and perjury had woven for him had been, most unfortunately, without a single loose thread. It had happened in Jamesville.

WHEN he reached a point a mile down from the crest of the Little Laurel, Reagle halted. He stood there, stalwart and hopeful in the light of the mounting sun, and let his hungry, topaz-brown eyes fairly drink up all that which lay between him and the boulder-strewn and rugged Ironhead. It was rather thickly settled for a mountain section. There were cabins and cabins, big and little, and to each was its big or little clearing.

On the nearer slope he saw the cabins of his people. Down to his left stood the well-remembered, rambling log house of old Jim McAuley. Across the little stream that split the valley in twain were the homes of the Brilharts, long-time enemies of the Reagles; and once again Copperhead Reagle thought of the truce that had been struck and sworn to by his father and old John Brilhart two years before the law had taken him away.

Then he noted with a sinking heart that no smoke came from the chimneys of the primitive houses of his people and that their clearings were filled with rankly growing weeds and briars and sassafras bushes. Home! He knew that he had no home.

Why hadn't Alice mentioned it—whatever it was—in her letters to him? He wondered, and his strong face became drawn as he wondered. Had it been because she wished to save him the pain that knowing would give him? That was it, no doubt; and it really was. Not one of his relatives had ever been able to read or to write.

Soon after his going to Nashville, Alice McAuley had persuaded the old storekeeper at Beechwood—a general store and an apology for a post-office, which stood three miles down that same valley—to teach her how to put her thoughts on paper with pen and ink. As for Copperhead, the prison chaplain had taught him to read and to write; he had learned in order that he might answer Alice's poor, scrawled letter.

"The Brilharts," guessed Tom Reagle. "They've wiped my folks clean out or run 'em off. Somebody's busted the truce."

He went on down through the tangled underbrush and walked like a man in a trance into the more level reaches of the valley of the shadow. The woodland was green and cool and fragrant with the breath of June, and the thrushes sang joyously in the laurel thickets; but Reagle neither saw nor heard anything of it all—this was the home-coming of which he had dreamed, day and night, for eight eternities of years!

When he came to himself again, he was standing at the head of a little cove, near a tiny, bubbling spring. Before him rose the smooth white body of a spreading beech tree; and there under his suffering eyes were the long grown-over initials of his name and Alice's. She had cut them there after she had learned to read. He took off his broad-rimmed hat out of sheer reverence, and at that instant there came the sound of light footfalls from behind him; they were not much heavier than those of a squirrel. He turned slowly and saw her—a slender and willowy, barefooted and bareheaded young woman who was glorious with the gentle roundness of maturity: a young woman in a simple dress of blue percale, whose eyes were the color of his and whose hair was of the brown of newly fallen chestnut leaves.

"Alice!" His two arms went out to her. "Alice!"

He went toward her.

She slipped into his arms; she couldn't have kept herself back, though she did try, had it meant her immortal salvation. He folded her close and kissed her on the forehead. For a brief moment the drab tragedy of his people's going was blotted out in that rush of long-delayed, ethereal happiness. Then—

"Tom," she said, "I ain't Alice."

He caught her arms at the shoulders, pushed her from him and held her firmly, while he stared hard into her face.

"You'll haf to know some time," she continued painedly, "and it might as well be now. I—I think I'd ruther die than to haf to tell ye this. I'm Bess, Tom."

Reagle dropped his hands to his sides and shrank just a little, but his gaze did not leave her face. Bess, Alice's sister, had been but sixteen when he had been taken away. She had looked a great deal like Alice, he remembered.

"I beg ye pardon, shore," he muttered queerly. "I didn't know. I ain't seed you nor Alice for eight years, o' course. And Alice——"

It was a question. Bess averted her gaze and began that which to Copperhead Reagle was torture:

"We never looked for ye back, Tom. Everybody said ye'd never live through it. Alice said the only thing we could do was to keep ye as happy as we could until ye went. That's why she never wrote to ye about the feud. The Brilharts got the help o' some o' their Nawth Ca'liner kinfolks and wiped ye people out, Tom—killed all 'at ye keered anything much about, and run the rest off. Ye mother died over the death o' ye pap. Ye brother Bill killed two Brilharts after he fell. Ye pap laid ahind of a poplar log and picked off four o' them Nawth Ca'liner Tarvins after he'd been shot through and through twicet. The' was three to one ag'inst the Reagles, Tom."

"Who," asked Copperhead, his voice bleak, "busted the truce?"

"A Brilhart. He was a drinkin', and my daddy seed him and axed him where he was a-goin'. 'I'm a-goin' over to kill me a string o' Reagles,' says the Brilhart. 'Ever eat one?' "

"And Alice?" Tom Reagle said again.

Bess took a firm hold on her feelings.

"Soon after you went to the penitenchy, Tom," she told him, "Alice took sick. She never got any better much. The feud finished her—she died a month after it was over. And—and I—I——"

She had been watching his countenance, and it had grown whiter all along. Now it frightened her. She knew that he was still the mountain-man, and that his heart was still the mountain heart, for all of those years that he had spent among men who were greatly different; and yet, his face frightened her.

"Go on, Bess," he said quietly, steadily.

"Alice knowed she'd haf to die," Bess resumed, speaking brokenly, somehow pitifully. "One day she whispered to me and says: 'Bess, honey, I'll haf to l'arn you how to write so's you can t-t-take my place and write to Tom. He mustn't know. It'll be the best way, for I know he cain't live so long in the penitenchy,' she says. And so I took her place a-writin' letters to you, Tom, for three years. We never thought ye'd find it out, and we wanted to keep ye as happy as ye could be in that awful prison. Maybe we done wrong, Tom. I don't know. But, ef we did, I'm shore ye can fo'give my sister. And I hope—to God—ye can find it in ye heart to fo'-fo'-fo'give me, too!"

She turned slowly and walked blindly from him, and he heard a sob tear itself from her throat as she went. Had he been his normal self, he would have followed her. But he was not his normal self. Tom Reagle was now steel that would neither break nor bend nor have its temper drawn, whereas he had been but steel before.

"Copperhead!" he exclaimed to the silence when he had stood there as still as a rosemary pine, and as straight, for five minutes after Bess McAuley had gone.

He laughed a bitter laugh.

"Copperhead!" said he. "It's a dandy name. Copperhead — copperhead snake!"

There was no question in his mind as to what he was going to do. But one word was written on the slate of his life now, and that one word was "vengeance." It was his way, the way of his fathers, the way of all the mountain-born; it was in religious keeping with their unwritten code of honor. Reagle stole back into the laurels and went, moving as swiftly and as silently as some wild animal of the wilderness, toward Beechwood for hardware.

The big log storehouse was owned by an old man named Evers, whom the neighborhood called affectionately "Grandpap." Evers was stooped and gray and as wrinkled as parchment; he was storekeeper, doctor, preacher, buyer of hides and of ginseng and keeper of the apology for a post-office. When Tom Reagle walked in, Evers ran smilingly behind one of his rough-board counters.

"I want a .38 Winchester and two hundred ca'tridges to fit it," calmly stated Reagle.

Grandpap Evers had in stock one such rifle, and he had plenty of ammunition for it; cartridges in that back o' beyond of Tennessee's hills were a greater staple than sugar or calico. He passed across the counter that which his new customer had called for.

Reagle smiled pleasedly at the feel of a good rifle in his hands; he worked the lever, placed a small piece of white paper in the breech opening and squinted through the barrel from the muzzle. It was clean, save for the necessary oil, and Reagle smiled again. Then he hastily proceeded to fill the magazine with powder and lead and brass, after which he quickly distributed the rest of the two hundred cartridges in his several pockets.

"Charge 'em," he said with a half defiant, bitter little grin, "to Copperhead Reagle."

Grandpap Evers stared under his glasses.

"Reagle?" he creaked. "You the one that went to the pen—to Nashville eight years ago?"

"One and the very same," Copperhead nodded hurriedly. "I got to go. I got to kill me a string o' Brilharts for the buzzards. Needn't to be afeard ye won't git ye money, Grandpap!"

Old Evers was inclined toward making the best of the matter

"Them Reagles always paid me," he said to himself, "ef they didn't lock horns with a rifle-bullet too soon."

Copperhead strode out of the store, looked about him to see whether there happened to be a Brilhart in sight and was disappointed because he saw none. Then he entered the laurels again. He headed for Jim McAuley's cabin now; he felt that he had to see old Jim once more, and he reasoned that this was the time to do it.

IT WAS high noon when he reached the rambling log house that had been the home of his Alice. He crept out of the undergrowth at the upper edge of McAuley's little clearing and stole down through the apple-trees, coming upon old Jim at the wood-pile just behind the cabin. McAuley, a lanky and bearded, kindly man, fairly jumped to meet the son of his one-time great crony.

"Tommy," he cried, seizing Reagle's free hand, "I'm plum' tickled might' nigh it to death to see ye! Bess told me ye'd got back."

Copperhead returned the old hillman's grip with interest; it was so good to shake the hand of a friend like this! McAuley went on: "You're jest in good time for dinner. Bess is a rattlin' good cook. Whether ye knowed it or not, pore little Bess is all the' is left to me now. Death gits us all some time, don't it? Le's go in the house and set down while we're a-waitin' on dinner, Tommy, boy."

Together they went around to the front of the cabin, crossed the honeysuckle-covered porch and entered the best room. McAuley pushed out an inviting sheepskin-lined rocker and dropped into another. When his visitor had seated himself with the new Winchester between his knees, the old mountaineer bent forward and began in a serious voice:

"Bess told me ye knowed everything, Tommy. I'm glad I got to see ye afore ye done anything. For the muzzle o' that rifle tells me plain 'at it ain't never been fired yit."

Reagle sat up straighter. At that moment barefooted Bess appeared in the doorway that led into the dining-room, and she was trying bravely to smile a welcome. Copperhead Tom Reagle ignored the presence of her; she was so everlastingly, tormentingly like Alice, and he hated her!

"Don't ye think," he said in tones of iron to McAuley, "that I got a right to pick off every man o' them low-down Brilharts?"

"Yes, ye shore have," McAuley agreed, twisting thoughtfully at the point of his iron-gray beard. "But ye're too good a man, and ye've already bore too much, Tommy, to haf to pay the price o' cleanin' up the Brilharts one by one—or any other way. Tommy, the arm o' the law has got to pokin' itself out here purty often o' late years.

"Why, ef the' was to be a feud now like was betwixt yore folks and the Brilharts, the'd be State gyards out here in fifteen hours! As shore as ye go to pickin' off Brilharts, jest that shore ye'll make yeself a outlaw, Tommy. It was the Brilharts 'at brung the law. By moonshinin' whisky, that's how.

"The's twelve men of 'em," McAuley went on, "and the's enough ag'inst every one of 'em to send 'em all to the penitenchy for life. They've killed one sheriff and a depity or two and a revenuer and shot up Jamesville—all in the last year. The main big trouble ketchin' 'em is they don't hardly ever stay at home none. Their famblies would shore be better off without 'em, Tommy."

"Dinner's ready," came the mild voice of Bess from the dining-room doorway.

Copperhead glanced toward her and quickly looked in another direction. How he hated her! But good old Jim McAuley mustn't know of it. Nobody must know of it. He hated himself because he hated Bess. Her father spoke again, and his lined face was now beaming with a great idea:

"Tommy, wouldn't it be fine ef ye could ketch all o' them Brilharts for the law—you, one lone man—so's they'd all be sent up to git a taste o' the same pizen medicine them two swore off on to you!"

Copperhead was thinking that same thing. It would be fine! It would be vengeance with a vengeance—and justice, too. Quickly his mind ran back to his trial and to that which had led to it. He had had hot words with a bullying logging-boss on Jamesville's main street just after nightfall, and two Brilharts had witnessed this. Five minutes afterward there had been shots in the dark, and a moment later he had stumbled over the dead body of the man with whom he had quarreled.

He had picked up a revolver that had two empty chambers; immediately afterward they had arrested him; the two Brilharts had sworn at the trial—regretfully, they tried to make it appear—that they had seen him shoot Plummer. And in spite of this, his kinsmen had bowed to his mother's pleading and kept to the truce until it was ruthlessly torn down by a drunken Brilhart!

But could he, one lone man, round up the twelve outlaws? All at once he raised his head, and there was fire in his eye.

"Jim," said he, "I'll do one o' two things. I'll tie them low-down polecats in a bundle and hand 'em over to the law—or else I'll die in my boots a-tryin' to do it. I'll go at it in the best way, too; first, I'll slip down to Jamesville, and ax the sheriff to swear me in as a depity; see?"

"Right!" exclaimed McAuley. "It's the very——"

"Dinner's ready," came again the mild voice of barefooted Bess.

Copperhead Reagle found himself now in a somewhat awkward place. He hated old Jim's girl; and, hating her, was it fair for him to eat the food that she had cooked? But he couldn't avoid it now; if he did, old Jim would suspect the truth. They went in to the noonday meal. Reagle had had no supper the evening before and no breakfast that morning, and he was ravenously hungry.

When McAuley had finished eating, he hastened out to drive a marauding hen and her brood of chicks from his lettuce bed, leaving his daughter and Copperhead alone in the log-walled dining-room. As Reagle rose from the table, Bess murmured, blushing—

"I hope ye can fo'give me, Tom."

Reagle's grip tightened on the post of the chair he had just set back to its place against the table, and he half turned to face her. He had broken her bread, he remembered. And yet—

"Bess," he replied evasively, "le's don't think any more about that."

He walked off, and Bess McAuley watched him go with heart-break in her soft brown eyes. He had tried to be decent with it, but—well, she knew that he held much against her, and she feared that it would always be thus.

Reagle left by way of the orchard and the laurels, as he had come, and hastened toward Jamesville.

Night had fallen when he reached the lowland town. However, Sheriff Gurson, a big and broad, blue-clad, broad-hatted man, was still in his little office, adjoining the jail, and Copperhead walked in without announcing his arrival by a rap at the door. The officer sat at a flat-topped desk on the other side of the room. He looked around impatiently as the mountaineer's heavy boots clattered on the floor.

"Well, tell it!"

Tom Reagle let the butt of his new Winchester drop gently beside his feet. He noted that Gurson was not the same sheriff who had arrested him and later seen him tried and convicted. If he had ever seen Gurson before, he did not remember it now.

"I understand you want the Brilharts caught," he said briskly.

"Want 'em caught!" snapped Gurson, in a half angry voice. He glanced toward a letter which lay open on his desk, an official letter which he had just received, and his face went a trifle red. "I reckon I do want 'em caught! The State offers two hundred dollars each for the dozen of 'em, and I'll swell that by a hundred dollars out o' my own pocket, which makes an even twenty-five hundred o' reward. I'm —— tired o' the name Brilhart; I hear it day and night, even though I've sure done all I could toward rounding 'em up. Do you want the job o' catching them?"

Reagle nodded.

"Swear me in as a depity."

Gurson looked the hillman over sharply, and he was not displeased with anything he saw. Then he drew an old Bible from one of the drawers of his desk—and he did it rather desperately; if the Brilharts were not caught before the next election, he was sure of defeat.

"Up with your right hand and put your left on this Book," he growled.

It was done in short order. Copperhead Reagle pinned a deputy's shield on his moth-eaten blue shirt, under his corduroy coat, jerked his rifle into the crook of his arm and departed. He stopped at a grocery store and with the last cankered cent of his money bought a few small tins of food; then he set out in the darkness for the hills.

AN HOUR before daybreak two mornings later Tom Reagle was engaged in keeping a close watch on the somewhat dilapidated cabin home of John Brilhart, high-light of the Brilharts. Jim McAuley had said that they were at home almost none; Reagle figured that they were at home every night, spending the days working over some well-hidden, illicit distilling outfit, which is often the manner in which such men and gangs of men live out their lives.

There was a light in the lean-to of this cabin, he noted, and soon the odor of frying bacon floated to his nostrils. He dropped to his hands and knees and crawled, dragging his rifle, to the split-paling fence that enclosed the narrow and weedy yard, and he was careful to make no noise that might alarm a possible zealous watch-dog.

After a few minutes of waiting he heard the cabin's weatherbeaten front door creak slowly open. Two more seconds—and the tall, gaunt figure of a bearded, elderly man, who carried a rifle, stepped to the ground. Reagle's determined, topaz-brown eyes narrowed. It was, he told himself, as he had suspected.

John Brilhart did not take a dog with him, which pleased Copperhead more than a little. Brilhart crossed the yard, went through the gateway and closed the gate soundlessly behind him and soon afterward entered a dim and winding woods trail that led around Ironhead Mountain. Copperhead Reagle followed him stealthily.

It was not long before the Brilhart leader halted in the dim path, set the butt of his rifle between his toes and stood there like a sentinel, waiting. Within five more minutes he was joined by the other eleven Brilharts, who came singly and by twos; each man of them carried his Winchester, and three of them had also brought along bags that contained coarsely ground corn-meal. When the dozen were all together, they filed, one by one, out the mountainside, bearing ever slightly upward. Never a word had passed between them, a fact that told Copperhead Reagle that this was a thing that had been done many, many times before.

A mile, two miles, they covered, and Reagle still followed them like a wolf in the gray dawn. Then they turned squarely to their right, deployed themselves a little like skirmishers on a battle line and went directly up the mountainside. This manner of going, Reagle knew, was to keep from making a path that might seem suspicious to officers of the law.

Copperhead found the trailing difficult now, for the Brilharts went through stretches of thickly standing laurel and over great nests of boulders. To climb that rugged mountainside in the early morning light, without making a sound that would loose death from one or more of the twelve rifles above, was no tenderfoot's job!

The day began to broaden, and Reagle had to be even more careful. He was somewhat puzzled now; distilling outfits can not be operated without water, and to his own knowledge there was neither a creek nor a spring ahead of him. Soon it had become so light that Reagle was forced to drop behind and follow more leisurely. His woodsman's instinct, which had been born within him, served him well; an hour after daybreak he was spying upon the Brilhart gang at their unlawful work!

It was all clever enough. As revenue officers invariably follow creeks, they also invariably watch for smoke; for the moonshiner can not ply his unlawful trade without fire any more than he can without water. The Brilharts took care of these telltale features by bringing live water in a line of stolen small iron pipe, which was hidden under the thick carpet of dead leaves, from a spring several hundred yards out the mountainside and by using for a chimney a great tree that was hollow its whole length! These tricks are common now; then they were almost unknown.

Having seen it all, Copperhead stole back, keeping always under cover of the laurels. When he had put two miles between him and the Brilhart gang, he sat himself down to evolve a plan. For he had to capture the enemy himself, all alone, that it might be the more humiliating to the enemy; and he wanted a manner of capture, too, that would in itself be humiliating. It would be both vengeance and justice, and, when it was done, his dead and gone kinsmen would cease to fidget in their graves.

All of the remainder of that day he sat there hidden, thinking, thinking, turning down one scheme after another because they were all in some way lacking. When darkness had fallen, he rose and stretched his limbs and went toward old Jim McAuley's cabin home. He wished to send McAuley to Jamesville in the morning with a message to the sheriff, for at last he had hit upon a plan that, daring as it was, promised much.

Bess answered his soft rap at the door. She smiled at him, and he nodded and pushed past her. Old Jim sat beside a small table on which a glass-bowled lamp burned brightly; across his knees lay an open Bible, and between his teeth he held the reed stem of a clay pipe. Copperhead halted beside McAuley, and then his eyes roved back to Bess.

"I hope—to God—ye can fo'give me, too!" he seemed to hear her say.

But still he hated her.

THE Brilharts' still had been erected in an opening, which was some thirty feet across, that had been cut in one of the biggest and most dense of laurel thickets. The great hollow tree that served as a chimney stood at the upper edge of the opening; just below it was the mud-and-stone furnace and the copper boiler; beside the boiler the water that came through the iron piping flowed over the copper worm. Near-by were two small oaken barrels; against the upper wall of the laurel were neatly stacked a dozen rifles.

It was half-past eight o'clock in the morning. Gaunt and bearded John Brilhart was on his knees before the furnace, putting dry heart-wood — which makes less and lighter smoke than wet or sap wood—on the fire. Beside him his son labored at the washing of a mash-tub. Another Brilhart stirred a mash of coarse corn-meal and water in another tub.

The rest of the moonshiners were sprawled here and there on the ground, smoking and saying nothing; these twelve lanky, unshaven men talked little when there was little need of it. They were a rought lot, in all truth, and, save for their leader, who was half-gray, they were as much alike as the fingers of your hand.

Suddenly there was the keen thunder of a near-by Winchester .38—a red-lipped gap jumped into John Brilhart's right ear—and a voice from the laurels somewhere near the chimney-tree bellowed:

"Hands up! We got you! Keerful now, boys!"

The speaker, who was perfectly hidden in the greenery, had counted much upon the element of surprize. He had figured that John Brilhart would leap to his feet with his hands up and that the rest of the outlaws would follow suit. And this is just what happened. Within three seconds he was speaking again, and rapidly, tersely, in a voice of ice and iron as he had spoken before:

"Don't move, you Brilharts; shoot, Gurson, ef they do! You revenue men over there—watch out! Kill 'em ef they move! Watch out, Sheriff—you and ye depities—keep ready triggers—everybody keep him a man covered! Now, Pete, leave ye' rifle here with George——"

A Brilhart had moved ever so slightly in order that he might see still another portion of the circular green wall that held the, to him, invisible Copperhead Reagle. *Bang*—went the Winchester, and the Brilhart's hat jumped backward two inches on his head. Tom Reagle went on as if he had not been interrupted:

"Pete, leave ye rifle here with George and slip down there and iron them twelve men, one's hand to another's—watch out, you revenuers; watch out, Gurson! All right, Pete!"

Reagle didn't believe they would recognize him, but he kept his hat drawn low on his forehead as a precautionary measure as he sprang unarmed into the cleared space behind the skyward-reaching Brilharts. Two more minutes, and he had taken twelve pairs of open and ready handcuffs from his belt and snapped them over the upward-held wrists of his enemies, linking them one to another. This done, he snatched up the dozen stacked rifles, hastened back to his Winchester, dropped the captured weapons and caught up his own and once more appeared at the edge of the small opening. The hammer of his rifle was back, and his finger was on the trigger.

"Well, John," with a bitter and menacing and yet triumphant smile, "it was purty cute for one lone man, wasn't it? For the' ain't no sheriff nor no depities but me, nor no revenue officers; I done it all by my lonesome, John—easy now! I'm Copperhead Reagle, and you-all knows what that means to you!"

They seemed more dazed than anything else. He showed them the badge the Jamesville sheriff had given him.

"Let ye hands down now, please," he went on—and they did it. "Ef ye'll all be right good, I'll take ye to jail alive. Ef ye won't—well, it don't make a —— little bit o' difference to me, shore. I got ye, and I can kill ye ef I want to hard enough without even bein' arrested for it—and God knows I want to a heap! Lead the way down the mountain, John; make for the Jamesville road at the old Haley cabin."

The Brilhart leader was ashen now. So were the other Brilharts. Had they only been aware of the fact that Copperhead was alone when he came down unarmed and ironed them! Their minds, cunning as they were, had been paralyzed by that lightning-quick, daring action of Copperhead's. They didn't move, and Reagle raised his new Winchester.

"All right. Ef ye want to save me the trouble o' takin' ye," he said threateningly, "so be it. Ye killed my mother and my daddy and my brother and my sweetheart, ye low-down polecats——"

His cold brown eye was on the sights, and the sights were level with the broken button of John Brilhart's left shirtpocket; his trigger-finger was beginning to flatten.

"Wait!" cried out at least half a dozen of the beaten outlaws. "We'll go wi' ye to Jamesville!"

Their leader's shaken voice led the chorus.

"Dead or alive?" Reagle wanted to know.

"Alive," they hastened to assure him.

Now that they didn't have the upper hand, they were plain waxlike cowards. Always it is like this with such men.

So Tom Reagle marched them, linked together in irons, down to the Jamesville road at the old Haley cabin, under the point of his gun. There he found a saddled black horse hitched to a sapling, and tied to the saddle was a long rawhide ox-whip; it was for these and the manacles that he had sent Jim McAuley to the sheriff. Then Reagle, ever with both eyes on his string of prisoners, mounted the horse, loosed the ox-whip and herded the dozen men along the road toward the lowland town.

"Ha-o!" he kept shouting in his riotous, certain triumph as he cracked the long whip over their heads; it was the harassing driving-cry of Tennessee cattlemen. "Ha-o! Ef ye don't move fast enough, ye git the lash; ef ye try any monkey work, look out for a hunk o' .38 lead between ye shoulder-blades—that's Gawspel truth. Ye killed my folks, didn't ye? Ye swore me into the pen, didn't ye? Ha-o! Ha-o, there! And now ye'll have a taste o' the pen yeselves—ha-o!"

They drew back—they swore; the stinging lash was their sure and swift reward. It was impossible for them to escape; it was impossible for them to do anything but move onward as their driver directed. Through the main street of Jamesville and to the jail's very door, Copperhead drove them mercilessly, the populace turning out *en masse* to see it; and always there rang victoriously that echoing and re-echoing, maddening cry of the Tennessee cattleman, which was always accompanied by the keen crack of the ox-whip in the air above their heads:

"Ha-o! Ha-o, there!"

WHEN at last his great triumph was complete and the dead and gone Reagles had ceased to fidget in their graves, Copperhead wore his deputy's shield proudly back to his old home hills to be the law out there. He found barefooted Bess McAuley in the open woodland before he had come within half a mile of her cabin home; it might have been that she had gone out to watch for him—who can tell?

The iron was out of his soul now, and he was again the normal man in his God-given pursuit of healthy human happiness. With one masterful, sweeping movement of his arms he caught Bess from the ground as if she were no bigger than a doll.

"Do ye fo'give me, Tom?" she asked him eagerly.

"Fo'give, ——!" cried Copperhead Tom Reagle. "Bess, it might ha' been you I was a-lovin'; it might ha' been Alice; it might ha' been the both o' ye—I don't know. For the past is gone, and the writin's on my slate has been all rubbed off clean. I don't know nothin' now, 'cept that I got twenty-four hundred and ninety-six dollars and a marriage license with yore name and mine on it right here in my pockets. Will ye take me, Bess?"

"Ef ye didn't have nary stitch o' clo'es on ye back, Tom," she answered, smiling and choking all at the same time, "it'd be the same; for I cain't—cain't rickollect the day when I didn't love ye, Tom."

ON THE RIVER

By ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD

HEY, Johnny! Let that key-log 'lone!
  Say, you—you wanta smash my leg?
That up-end hit'll mash the bone
The way you'd crack a bally egg!
Hi—there she goes! She moves all right—
Quick! Jump her—that's it—let her drive.
By gad, she sure was good and tight—
Now let her run alive!

Gee! see that stick—she's some tree, that;
She's thirty feet and she's three across;
That's Maurice' cut, I bet a hat—
I cruised last year for Maurice' boss.
A shame to feed that through the spill,
As fine a log as you'd want to see,
For news-print stuff in a pulpin' mill—
That's a —— of a death for a decent tree!

THE SON OF A FOOL

by EDGAR YOUNG

Author of "The Ninth Man," "A Question of Psychology," etc.

I HAD tramped over a hundred thousand miles with Eugene Rodin before he told me about it—this thing he had kept to himself for fear of what I might think. A hundred thousand miles. It looks small as I pen it. But there are miles in there that wreaked tortures on bodies and minds beyond my powers to describe. The beach trail from Limon, Costa Rica, to Puerto Viejo, and across the jungle-clad hills to Changuenola, Panama—sunburned, fever-ridden, delirious—are contained in that sum total. And the memory of this cruel trip is seared on my brain until I shall go down to my grave remembering it.

But it, at that, was only one of the many yardsticks by which Eugene Rodin and I measured each other. Another was the jaunt from Rio to B. A.—overland and broke—and still broke across the Andes to Valpo, Chile. We windjammed back around the horn to B. A. and went up into the Chaco during the harvest.

Through all of South America, Central and Mexico we adventured. And perchance into your own home town here in the States, for we were in every State a time or two and many times across the Dominion. We worked and tramped and tramped and worked, for we were young and the pot of gold lay buried just beyond at the rainbow's end. But Rodin always detoured his home town as I did mine.

And we found out about each other. And I know that he weighed me as I did him, and his judgment concerning me was better than my own. Perhaps this is how he came to tell me at all. After he mentioned it, hemming and hawing and struggling to keep me from seeing how serious it was we never spoke of it again. I remember it as well as if it were yesterday, for, although we never spoke of it again, I brooded the question in my mind times without number, and often I caught Rodin turning it around in his own mind and brooding it from his angle.

We were in Mexico when he told me. There are caves in the sides of the cliffs between Guaymas and Empalme that have been hollowed out by the waves in years gone by and into which the sea does not now come except during storms. Night had overtaken us and we had gathered up driftwood and built a fire within the mouth of one of these caves. The nights are sharp, and hungry men feel the chill of the air.

We had crouched there on the sand staring into the coals for a long time—thinking, thinking. And listening with half an ear to the gentle lapping of the waves below and the shrill call of night-birds as they wheeled far overhead. It was such a night and such a setting that makes men speak of things that lie buried in their heart of hearts.

He looked across at me several times as if about to speak. He then grinned a twisted little smile and asked me for one of our last two *canelas*. He lit it and inhaled deeply.

"Sandy," he at last vouchsafed, "you

never heard me speak very much about my old man, did you?"

And then he told me about it. I am afraid his eyes were often moist, for I did not look to see; but there was a catch in his voice at times, and he paused now and then to gaze out across the bay as if he saw something before he continued.

Blood's thicker than water, isn't it? How would you like to have a fool for a father? No wonder Eugene Rodin found the story hard to tell. For his father was the village fool and the laughing-stock of all the hicks for miles around. Take it home to yourself and see how you'd feel about it! Do you wonder that Rodin had never told me before? But he did tell it at last down to the last sorry detail.

What touched me most was the fact that he knew as well as I how his mother must have felt during all those years. I don't suppose you would want your mother laughed at for things she couldn't help? And you wouldn't want to see her working twice as hard as she would otherwise have had to do if she had not had a fool for a husband. But some way or other—God alone knows how, and he won't tell—she made strap and buckle meet, and the rags and tatters of Luke Rodin were just half as bad as they would otherwise have been had it not been for her, and her brood of kids were just half as hungry as they might have been.

I could picture the little woman stalling to outsiders as if she had a real man for a husband, working her legerdemain and hocus-pocus in the household, and all the time striving like a nigger to try and offset the folly of him.

Eugene Rodin did not speak of himself in the telling of this tale, but I read between the lines how keenly he must have felt it. One of the glories of being a child is to think the father the wisest and best man in the world. I could picture him fighting grimly, firm in his belief, to uphold the name of his father among the other boys. But disillusionment had come. I could picture the overpowering shame that had come upon him. Not only the feet, but the brain of his idol were of mud.

He endured the taunts of his comrades for a time, for childhood is ever cruel. And then he had crept out from the tumbledown little farmhouse by night, out across the rocky patch of ground that Luke Rodin had been able to hold because none of his wily neighbors had seen fit to do him out of it, sobbing as he hurled stones at his good friend, Scamp—who felt a strange intuition and wished to follow—and ran as fast as his legs would carry him, because he feared his heart might fail, toward the railroad station five miles away.

He would show them! Just let him get a whack at the world, and he would come back and make them all look like thirty cents! He would rub money under their noses, and he would dress up his father and mother and the kids better than any other in the village. The rainbow end was just across the hills at the railroad which lead away into the big world, and the pot of gold would be his for the taking.

II

THIS TELLING of this tale spurred me anew. We must get the big stake. I wanted Rodin to go back and show those hicks up. Money and good clothes would put a different face on things back there. My idea for rainbow-chasing had been different from his. Sane and sensible if I cared to explain.

Time had been lost. Rodin was almost thirty. I was getting along in that direction myself. We fell to planning, and gray dawn found us with our heads together. I decided that I would turn to and help him get his stake first. His people were getting old, and he had been gone fifteen years now. If he did not hurry, they would be too old to enjoy it. As for the kids, they were no doubt all married or dead by this time.

I was hot as with a fever to get away from this part of Mexico and to somewhere, anywhere, where chances were better. There were great stores of buried jewels down around the city of Mex; there were the catacombs of Guatemala to explore, the caverns of Copan in Honduras, the gold that the Incas had dumped by tons into the bottom of crater lakes in Andean Peru; there was the source of this gold, undiscovered, somewhere in the high stretches of the Andes; there was a sunken ship right in the harbor at Corinto with the purser's safe full of money, there were the lost emerald mines of the Aztecs somewhere between Mexico and Panama—and a thousand other easy ways of making a big stake.

We arose and hastened toward Guaymas

with new hope in us. We had dallied along and lost time in the past. But now we would really go at it and make good. We were inspired anew. Every force within us rallied to our standards. Disappointment had been our lot many times in the past, and the keen knives of our adventure spirits had been hacked and dulled. But now they were whetted keen.

We were pals tried by a thousand fires. We had stood hunger for weeks together. In Brazil we fasted forty-two days. We had fought for each other. We had been sick unto death with each other, loved the same girl, frozen together, burned up in tropical heat together and gone through hell a time or two for each other just to show that we were on the square.

One man in a thousand rings true under the white-hot test of hardship and starvation. The least little yellow in him will show like saffron. And I knew how to appreciate a pal like Eugene Rodin. Consequently, if he was going to the mat for his old folks, I would stick by him and go to the mat with him until I was as old and gray-headed as a rat. Had the tables been reversed, he would have done the same for me.

At this time we just happened to be on the tramp. Between us we had enough trades, professions and crafts to work any place that was open, be it what it may. We didn't hit the booze, but we saved our money when we worked and spent it for outfits to try and get a big chunk of cash all at one time. What's the use of working all your life and saving ten or fifteen dollars a month until you die of old age or let some wise guy skin you out of it? Cast your bread on the waters! Take a chance! And don't cry if it gets water-logged and sinks, or the sharks gobble it up.

III

YOUR judgment was good, but our luck was bad. We blew out of Guaymas that night on a Russian tramp for Salina Cruz and stoked a Pacific Mailer to Corinto. We worked for the railroad long enough to make the price of a straw rancho and lot—forty dollars—two fishing-nets—one hundred and fifty dollars—two rowboats—ten dollars—a second-hand diving-suit—ninety dollars—and a sailboat—seventy-five dollars. We knew where the sunken *San Juan* lay, for we had seen it on a clear day through the bottom of a pail when we were there before. This time we intended to use strategy. That's how we came to start this fishing business.

We lasted for a month, and, about the time we had everything set to make the attempt on the first dark night, the *comandante* decided we were smuggling. He gave us our choice of leaving before sundown or being stood against a wall with a small scrap of paper pinned over our hearts. The fact that every one in Corinto caught their own fish and that there weren't enough fish in the bay to pay the salaries of two white men for a month had aroused the old don's suspicion.

At any rate, there was only a measly forty thousand in gold in the safe. That was only pocket-money for the Incas. So we started for Peru, going overland as far as Panama, with an eye out for emerald veins.

We chipped rust to Guayaquil and stopped to work out the price of a third-class ticket to Callao with the G. & Q. Company. A revolution came up—Alfaro *contra* Plaza—and we got stuck there for five months. Many thousands were killed, died with yellow jack and bubonic, got eaten up by crocodiles in the swamps or dragged down by sharks in the rivers. The river—Guayas—was always full of floating corpses, going down with the tide and coming back up with the tide for days before they were finally carried out to sea.

Men whose faces were swollen as large as water-pails and as black as ebony with yellow fever crawled moaning through the streets to slake their thirst in the river, where they died and lay until the smell of their rotting bodies reached to high heaven. The world quarantined against Guayaquil, the graveyard of South America—*El sepulcro*—for the hundredth time. There is no describing the misery that prevailed there. The man who tries it will be branded as a liar if he tells only half the truth.

Families were smitten with bubonic and were dead before the last rat had scampered from the hut. They died so quickly that their glands—a mark of the disease—did not swell until after death. It was the most virulent form of this most virulent disease. Men were hacked with machetes, and they rotted with infection on the wharves and on the railroad station platform across the river at Duran until they died.

In the midst of it the greatest earthquake that Ecuador had ever known came and shook the earth for a full afternoon. Fire broke out and burned many women and children. Then came a tropical deluge that put out the fires but drowned many people and washed away others. Human life was cheaper than a handful of dried beans. It was the cheapest thing in Ecuador. The vultures and sharks were gorged. Even the shrimp which hung to the corpses in the rivers in great clusters were fat and sleek.

But we lasted through it all and made a joke of it to each other. Eugene Rodin was there with a cheery word and a hand on the shoulder when cheery words and hands on shoulders were worth the ransom of a hundred kings. When my nerves were jumping and I felt my senses reeling through the long, hot nights, he lit a candle and came and stood over me and asked me if I had eaten something that did not agree with me, although he knew as well as I what my ailment was. And jokingly he told me that it was a great life if I did not weaken and that the worst was yet to come.

And at last the hell's nightmare was ended. General Alfaro, the ambitious ex-president, and six of his leaders were dragged through the streets of the capital, hacked to pieces and burned in the public square. General Montero fared likewise in Guayaquil. The *revolucionistas* were exterminated. Ecuador resumed the tenor of its way, and we did ours—getting out on the first boat that was allowed to leave. We made Callao and hopped over on the trolley to Lima, where we expected to take the Peru Central for Arroya and Cuzco, the old Inca capital.

We got a room at a native *pension* for a tenth of what it would have cost us at the Maury or the Cardinal—and, besides, we were not dressed and looking up to the standards of the foreigners who stopped at these two hotels. Bah for them! Amateurish *gringo* tourists, packing cameras and snap-shotting churches, asking crazy questions. We usually shunned them in all foreign cities.

IV

THERE in Lima we took a few days of well-earned rest, days spent in strolling around the city or lolling in the shady plazas; nights we spent in oblivious slumber. There had been nights on nights in Guayaquil when we had been unable to sleep so much as an hour. When death stalks abroad, the brain is keen and the nerves restless. Lima soothed us like a lullaby. So we tarried until the days had grown into weeks before we arose one morning, took stock of our dwindling cash and bethought us of the mission we had ahead of us in the tops of the Andes, which once had been the mighty kingdom of the Incas.

We knew we could earn money to outfit us at either Arroya, with the railroad, or at Cerro de Pasco, at the mines, for the company that owns both railroad and mines is an American one; their commissaries are well supplied with equipment and clothing.

Right at this juncture our luck proved bad again. With the best of judgment one has to have luck break with him to make good. Eugene Rodin fell sick with a raging fever the day before we had set to depart. I swore bitterly at this. We had both gone through a war, an earthquake, a fire, a flood, a pestilence of every known and unknown disease in Guayaquil and had remained well with the exception of a touch of neurasthenia—which was to be expected. And now he had fallen sick. It was similar to a man drowning in a bathtub after having sailed the seven seas, or breaking a neck by a fall from a door-step after having dived from the tops of the highest church spires.

The native medico I summoned pronounced it a *calentura*—fever—which I knew without paying him five *soles* to find out. The American doctor, down from one of the copper mines, was in a hurry to make the outbound Peru Central train but paused to puzzle for a few moments over the case. He admitted frankly that the disease had him stumped and suggested trying to get Rodin to Panama right away.

In another day I knew what it was without paying any one to tell me, for he was covered from head to foot with warts. It was the wart fever, *verugas*, the most deadly fever known to the medical profession. Three American doctors had perished at the fatal Verugas Bridge a few years before, when the scourge had broken out, trying to discover what it was that carried the germ.

It had stopped construction work on the bridge—Peru Central R.R.—had cost several thousands their lives, and work was only able to resume when it ran itself out and subsided. Now and again it reappears in some section or other of Peru near the river and smites with an almost unerring hand. No cure is known for it. It is a gambler's chance that not one of the warts will break inwardly which is—fatal.

When I announced to the keeper of the *pension* that my friend had *verugas*, he called upon all of his saints and ran shouting it through the house. It emptied like magic. Its occupants dashed out like rats from a burning ship. This *verugas* was something they feared ten times more than yellow fever or bubonic. I ran to the window and saw the other houses in the same block being emptied of their occupants and meager furnishing—for the neighborhood was very poor.

Flags were posted later in the afternoon at each end of the block, and I and my raving companion had a world to ourselves. I was doctor, nurse and cook. The Peruvian people were kind and brought food and set it in the street a little way from the corner, but, when I came to get it, they ran shouting away. I was worse than a leper. I did not blame them for not wanting to take chances. But they sent us of their very best to eat, often a bottle of wine and now and then a book.

Rodin was constantly delirious from the first day he was taken down with the fever. At the end of a week I was half-delirious myself from loss of sleep and worry as to his fate. It was plain to me he would surely die if I did not have help in caring for him. The news had gone abroad throughout the city that a *gringo* had *verugas* in a *pension* on Calle Conventillo and that another gringo tended him there.

Americans sent notes of sympathy by messenger, which were placed in the calabash trays that contained our food and drink. Some even went so far as to enclose a bank-note. But, among all the useless things they sent, money was the most useless, for I was unable to buy anything with it.

On the twelfth day my pal had lost all resemblance to a human being. He screamed and gibbered in his delirium in an unceasing stream both day and night. He hurled himself from side to side in the bed like a savage monster. His face was so disfigured by the purple warts, his eyes so blood-shot and protruding from their sockets, his voice so hoarse and animal-like, that at times, when he plunged at me, I could scarce refrain from ending his life with a bullet for pity.

But I tore a sheet into strips and bound him hand and foot and tied him to the posts of the bed. And all that I could do for him I did, for I knew, if the case were reversed, he would have done all that he could for me. It was this thought that nerved me and kept me from shouting insanely in unison with Eugene Rodin. I was going to pieces fast. At times I got so that I did not know what I was doing for hours at a time. I forgot to go for the food at the corner, and, when I did think of it, I had to hang on to the sides of the buildings to keep from falling as I tottered out for it.

And then, as I sat in a dazed stupor, trying to hold my wits together, but my mind teeming with endless hordes of phantasmagorial monsters, I came to realize that my hands were covered with warts like the back of a horned toad and that a stream of froth was flowing from my mouth. I snatched my revolver from the table and swore to end the suffering of Rodin and myself with two well-directed shots while I was yet able; otherwise we would both die like festering rats in a trap. The revolver fell from my feeble grip and clattered to the floor, and I wept hysterically that I was unable to recover it.

Then a hand that was cool as marble was placed on my brow. It steadied my reeling senses. I turned and looked up into the face of a woman with hair as white as spun silk who smiled and told me all was well. A patriarchal man bent over the form of Eugene Rodin. I dimly remember seeing the woman roll up her sleeves and begin sweeping the littered floor, while the old man began gathering up the scattered dishes from the untidy table. They were speaking English but I was unable to hold the thread long enough to know of what they spoke.

V

AND for weeks I traveled a lonely journey through that dream country just across the border of which is death. My feet trod paths whose sands were hot as fire; sharp thorns and cactus tore my flesh; the sun was ever torturing me; odd shapes screamed at me from behind what appeared to be huge stones until I approached and found they were only clouds that dispersed at a hand wave.

It was ever lonely, and at times I cried out that it was more than I could endure.

But something always whispered that I must keep on and on to the end of the trail and there I would find rest. And I did keep on until at last I reached a cool spring of crystal water among the stones, sheltered by huge leafy trees. I threw myself on the soft grass to sleep.

And, when I awoke, I knew I was well. For I found myself in a bed, with an old man watching me with luminous eyes.

"I jest knowed you would come to yourself during my watch. Mother and Gene and I have been setting by you for eight hours apiece. And I wanted you to come to when I was here alone, for I had something to tell you."

I gazed at the old man curiously. This man sitting there was no part of the dreams I had been having. He was evidently the man who, with the old lady, had arrived just as I went down and out. He was dressed in a neat linen suit of the kind that prosperous tourists wear in the tropics, and his whole appearance bespoke prosperity. His Panama hat lay on the table beside him. But it was his face that caught and held my attention.

He had a determined chin, a steady mouth, a well-shaped ear, a most wonderful pair of steel-blue eyes that told the world of a noble soul within his body. But his forehead was pinched in until it was all out of keeping with the rest of his face. His forehead from the eyes up was like that of a boy of ten. Here, plainly, was a man of no great intellect, but my keen intuition, after my illness, told me that this was a man with a heart of gold.

There was a resemblance somewhere or other that made me think of Eugene. The old man smiled down at me all the time I scrutinized him. At last it came to me.

"You are the father of Eugene Rodin."

Luke Rodin chuckled.

"I knowed you'd see that we favored. Yes, I'm old Lucas Rodin, and I ain't got a lick of sense—though it took me fifty years to find it out. I'm nigh on to seventy now. After I did find it out and got her to do the managing and me do the working, we surely prospered."

And then he told me the story of how they had arisen from poverty and contempt to wealth and esteem, always giving "mother" the credit of everything that had been done but binding me to secrecy should I ever come to his neighborhood. People who had ridiculed him had later come cringing to him to borrow money when in need. He stood with honor now in his community, was a political leader, a pillar in the church, a member of the district schoolboard and belonged to several lodges. He had made good.

But all of this was only by the way of what he really wished to tell me and ask me. The mother had worried about her wandering boy, and he, too, had worried; but it is not given to man to grieve for a son as it is to a mother. He had felt that the finding of Eugene would atone in a measure, for what she had done for him by her management. So they had set out in search for him until they should either find him or find where he lay buried.

They followed every clue, however vague, and that is how they happened to come to the *pension* where he lay sick and beyond recognition. And it was with surprize that they found themselves repaid for their charity by finding that one of the sick men they tended was their own son. This recognition had come while I was still unconscious, and family ties had been renewed. Eugene had told them all about me and vowed he would not quit me.

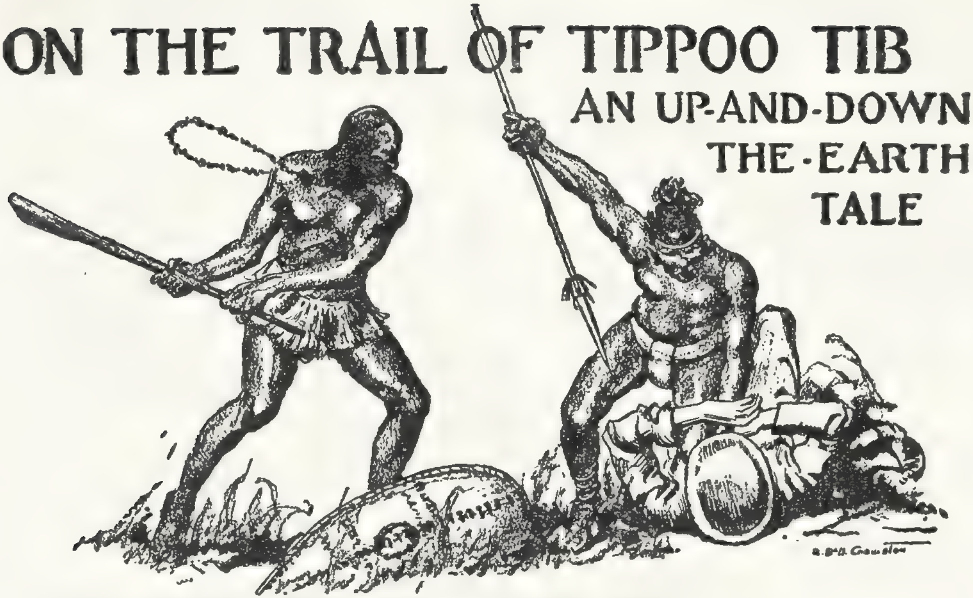
This was what the old man wished to ask me about. He wanted to know if I would prevail upon Rodin to go home with his mother. I promised, and he tiptoed out through the door and down the hall to call the two of them in.

That is how I came to hit the trail for Cuzco alone with a love in my heart for all the world. The old folks begged and pleaded with me to go back with them and told me they had enough for us all. And Eugene Rodin faltered many times and swore he would not quit me. But I told him what his duty was and to go ahead and do it. He knew I spoke the truth when I told him I would rather have him quit me than continue. This was going to be a supreme test for both of us, and we must not fail.

Lonely nights I would spend, wrapped in my blanket, gazing into the fathomless stars, as I hit the trail alone. Nights he would sweat and fume in the stuffy little farmhouse and sigh for the trail. Luck had broken that way, and it was up to us to make the most of it like men.

ON THE TRAIL OF TIPPOO TIB

AN UP-AND-DOWN-THE-EARTH TALE



A SIX-PART STORY PART III

by TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "Heinie Horns into the Game," "The End of the Bad Ship Bundesrath,*" etc.*

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

WE first heard of Tippoo Tib and his ivory in the lazaretto at Zanzibar, where a French steamer had dumped us—Monty, Fred Oakes, Bill Yerkes and me. A one-eyed attendant told us of the treasure, and, because it was seeking fortune that had sent us wandering up and down the earth, we kept our ears open to the story of the old Arab and his great hoard of ivory hidden somewhere in the Congo. We found it a prize worth trying for and prepared to set out at once.

Rumor of our intended search spread quickly about Zanzibar, and many men came to us. Hassan was first, a reputed nephew of Tippoo Tib himself. Then a Greek denounced Hassan as a German spy and boasted valiantly of what he, Georges Coutlass, could do to aid us. Both we listened to politely and sent on their ways.

We made our plans.

"I'll go interview the King of Belgium," said Monty, who is Lord Montdidier and Kirkcudbrightshire and whom we had elected leader of the party. "Fred must go to British East and watch Schillingschen, the German, who is supposed to know all about this thing. Then you and Yerkes may as well go by way of British East to Muanza on Victoria Nyanza and from there to the Congo border. Yerkes is the only American in the crowd, and they'll suspect him least of all. He can make a great show of looking for ground to settle on."

Hassan came around again, and Georges Coutlass. It was while we were pleasantly engaged in throwing the latter down-stairs that we met Lady Saffren Waldon.

This lady, of uncertain age, had no savory history, for scandal had linked her name with an episode concerning papers stolen from the War Office and delivered to a German agent, and now she was probably a German agent herself. Monty warned us to keep away from her, but that night Yerkes and I were duped into rushing into her room, drawn there by well-feigned screams for aid. Three great Arabs caught us and pressed knives against our throats, while the charming lady told us to tell Lord Montdidier he might sign an agreement to share the ivory with the Sultan of Zanzibar—or he should suffer the consequences. We did not think it worth while to bother Monty with a report of the affair.

Then the four of us sailed from Zanzibar, Monty going to Brussels to see the king and we others to British East in accordance with the plan. On the ship that took us were Hassan and Georges Coutlass and Lady Saffren Waldon.

At Mombasa we learned that we were suspected persons, and only after we had paid an enormous deposit were we allowed to have the guns we had brought along.

That was the first obstacle we had to overcome.

WE GOT an unexpected bit of help at Mombasa, too, for there we met Courtney, whom I had worshiped in my youth as the mightiest hunter since Nimrod. He gave us some advice.

"There are caves in Mount Elgon large enough to hold a world's revenue," he said. "The ivory is likely scattered all over Africa—most of it in the Congo, probably—but Elgon is the best chance. You'll find the best route there by way of Kisumu and Mumias."

This last he shouted from the platform as the train we had taken for the interior of British East pulled out of the station. Very likely Lady Saffren Waldon heard it, for she was in the compartment next to ours.

Hassan and Coutlass were also on the train. We were being well watched.

In our compartment a red-bearded settler introduced himself as Brown of Lumbwa and offered us a drink from a jug of Irish whisky. He looked relieved when we refused, and, by the time we all left the train at Nairobi, he had emptied the jug himself.

We put up at the only hotel, where that night Lady Saffren Waldon made us a proposal.

"We will give you a fair price for what you know about the ivory," she said, "if you will promise to give up the search."

"Whom do you mean by we?" asked Fred.

"The German Government, the Sultan of Zanzibar and myself."

We laughed at the proposal. She became angry and declared that Monty had been murdered on board ship, only to retract the story a moment later. The conversation led to nothing.

When we got back to our room, we found that it had been sacked. Nothing was missing except a small pocket map, which, though it had some suspicious markings, was of no importance.

Lions roared about the hotel all night, and I arose early the next morning for a walk about the village. On the outskirts I came upon a camp. From the largest of the imposing array of tents issued a voice—I recognized it as Hassan's—addressing some one as Bwana Schillingschen and giving an account of the theft of our map by Lady Saffren Waldon's maid. At the end of the tale a guttural voice dismissed the spy with orders to steal the map. I strolled up casually.

"Who are you?" demanded Professor Schillingschen.

When he found he could learn nothing from me, he became so angered that he set about having me arrested on a trumped-up charge of shooting game illegally.

Of course I was released, but the affair put Will and Fred and me in no favorable light with the local officials.

AT THE hotel there was a pleasant surprize for us. A squarely built, snub-nosed native, not very dark-skinned but very ugly—his right ear slit and almost all of his left ear missing—without any of the brass—or iron—wire ornaments that most of the natives of the land affect, but possessed of a Harris tweed shooting-jacket and, of all unexpected things, boots that he carried slung by the laces from his neck—waited for us, squatting with a note addressed to Fred tied in a cleft stick.

It does not pay to wax enthusiastic over natives, even when one suspects they bring good news. We took the letter from him, told him to wait and went on in. Once out of the man's hearing Fred tore the letter open and read it aloud to us. It ran:

> Herewith my Kazimoto. Be good to him. It occurred to me that you might not care after all to linger in Nairobi, and it seemed hardly fair to keep the boy from getting a good job, simply because he could make me comfortable for the remainder of a week. So, as there happened to be a special train going up, I begged leave for him to ride in the caboose. He is a splendid gun-bearer. He never funks but reloads coolly under the most nerve-trying conditions. He has his limitations, of course, but I have found him brave and faithful, and I pass him along to you with confidence.
>
> And, by the way, he has been to Mount Elgon with me. I was not looking for buried ivory, but he knows where the caves are in which anything might be.
>
> Wishing you all good luck,
> Yours truly,
> F. COURTNEY.

For a moment we felt like men possessed of a new horse apiece. We were for dashing out to look the acquisition over. But Will checked us.

"Recall what Courtney said about a dog?" he asked. "We can't all own him!"

Fred sat down.

"Ex-missionaries own dice," he announced. "That's how they come to be ex! You'll find them in the little box on that shelf, Will. We'll throw a main for Kazimoto!"

"I know a better gamble than that."

"Name it, America."

"Bring the coon in and have him choose!"

So I went out and felt tempted to speak cordially to the homeless, ugly black man—to give him a hint that he was welcome. But it is a fatal mistake to make a "soft" impression on even the best natives at the start.

"*Karibu!*"* I said gruffly when I had looked him over, using one of the six dozen Kiswahili words I knew as yet.

THE AROSE with the unlabored ease that I have since learned to look for in all natives worth employing and followed me indoors. Will and Fred were seated in judicial attitudes, and I took a chair beside them.

"What is your name?" demanded Fred.

"Kazimoto."

"Um-m-m! That means 'Work-like-the-devil.' Let us hope you live up to it. Your former master gives you a good character."

**Karibu* (Kiswahili)—enter—come in.

"Why not, *Bwana?* My spirit is good."

"Do you want work?"

"Yes."

"How much money do you expect to get?"

"*Sijui?*"

"Don't say '*sijui'!*" I cut in, remembering Schillingschen's method.

"Six rupees a month and *posho,*" he said promptly.

Posho means rations—or money in lieu of rations.

"Don't you rather fancy yourself?" suggested Fred with a perfectly straight face.

"Say two dollars a month all told!" Will whispered to me behind his hand.

"I am a good gun-bearer!" the native answered. "My spirit is good. I am strong. There is nobody better than me as gun-bearer!"

"We happen to want a head man," answered Fred. "Have you ever been head man?"

"No."

"Would you like to be?"

"Yes."

"Are you able?"

"Surely."

"Choose, then. Which of us would you like to work for?"

"You," he answered promptly, pointing at Fred.

It was on the tip of the tongue of every one of us to ask him instantly why, but that would have been too rank indiscretion. It never pays to seem curious about a native's personal reasons, and it was many weeks before we knew why he had made up his mind in advance to choose Fred and not either of us for his master.

His choice made and the offer of his services accepted, he took over Fred forthwith—demanded his keys—found out which our room was—went over our belongings and transferred the best of our things into Fred's bag and the worst of his into ours—remade Fred's bed after a mysterious fashion of his own, taking one of my new blankets and one of Will's in exchange for Fred's old ones—cleaned Fred's guns thoroughly, after carefully abstracting the oil and waste from our gun-cases and transferring them to Fred's—removed the laces from my shooting-boots and replaced them with Fred's knotted ones—sharpened Fred's razors and shaved himself with mine—to the enduring destruction of its once artistic edge—and departed in the direction of the bazaar.

He returned at the end of an hour and a half with a motley following of about twenty, arrayed in blankets of every imaginable faded hue and in every stage of dirtiness.

"You wanting cook," he announced. "These three making cook."

He waved three nondescripts to the front, and we chose a tall Swahili because he grinned better than the others.

"Although," as Fred remarked, "what the devil grinning has to do with cooking is more than anybody knows."

The man, whose name was Juma, turned out to be an execrable cook, but, as he never left off grinning under any circumstances—and it would have been impossible to imagine circumstances worse than those we warred with later on—we never had the heart to dismiss him.

After that Yerkes and I selected a servant apiece, who were destined forever to wage war on Kazimoto in hopeless efforts to prevent his giving Fred the best end of everything. Mine was a Baganda who called himself Matches, presumably because his real name was unpronouncable. Yerkes chose a Malindi boy named Tengeneza—and that means arrange in order, fix, make over, manage, mend—no end of an ominous name!

They were both outclassed from the start by Kazimoto. But, to add to the handicap, he insisted that, since he was head man, he would need some one to help look after Fred at times when other duties would monopolize his attention. He himself picked out an imp of mischief whose tribe I never ascertained, but who called himself Simba—Lion—and there and then Simba departed up-stairs to steal for Fred whatever was left of value among Will's effects and mine.

We had scarcely got used to the idea of having a savage apiece to wait on us when Kazimoto turned up at the door with a string of porters

"This hotel no good!" he announced. "Pitching camp, that good!"

What he said about the hotel was the plain truth; so we let him have his way.

Presently Brown of Lumbwa came lurching past the township camping-ground and viewed Kazimoto with his gang pitching our tents.

"Where you chaps going?" he demanded, leaning against the wall.

Fred took advantage of the opportunity and examined him narrowly as to his knowledge of German East and ways of getting there. He was in an aggravating mood that made at one moment a very well of information of him and at the next a mere garrulous ass.

"Come along 'o me t' Lumbwa," was his final word on the matter. "I'll put you on a road nobody knows an' nobody uses!"

We spent that night under canvas and, without going into details with him, we agreed to go with him "some of the way." Fred spent the whole of the next morning in the bazaar buying loads of food and general supplies. Will and I engaged porters and, with Kazimoto's aid as interpreter, had fifty ready to march that afternoon.

The whole trick of starting on a journey is to start. If you only make a mile or two the first day, you have at least done better than stand still; loads have been apportioned and porters broken in to some extent; you have broken the spell of inertia, and thereafter there is less likely to be trouble. We made up our minds to get away that afternoon, and I was sent back to the hotel to find Brown, who had gone for his belongings.

If Brown had stayed sober, all might have been well. But his headache and feeling of unworthiness had been too much for him. and I found him with a straw in the neck of a bottle of whisky, alternately laying down the law to Georges Coutlass and drinking himself into a state of temporary bliss.

"You Greeks dunno nothin'!" he asserted as I came in. "You never did know nothin', an' you're never goin' to know nothin'! 'Cause why? I'll tell you. Simply because I ain't goin' to tell! I'm mum, I am! When s'mother gents an' me have business, that's our business—see! None o' your business—'s our business, an' I'm not goin' to tell you Greeks nothin' about where we're off to nor why nor when. An' you put that in your pipe an' smoke it!"

I SAT in the dining-room for a while, hoping that the Greek would go away; but, as Brown was fast drinking himself into a condition when he could not have been moved except on a stretcher and was momentarily edging closer to an admission of all he knew or guessed about our intentions, I took the bull by the horns at last—snatched away his whisky bottle and walked off with it.

He came after me, swearing like a trooper, and his own porters, who had been waiting for more than an hour beside his loads, trailed along after him. Once in our camp, we made a hammock for him out of a blanket tied to a pole and gave him over to two porters with the promise that they would get no supper if they lost him. Then we started—up-hill toward the red Kikuyu heights, where settlers were already trying to grow potatoes for which there was no market and onions that would only run to seed.

To our left rear and right front were the highest mountain ranges in Africa. Before us was the pass through which the railway threaded over the wide, high tableland before dipping downward to Victoria Nyanza. On our left front was all Kikuyu country, and after that Lumbwa and reserves and forest and swamp and desert and the German boundary.

We made a long march of it that first day and camped after dark within two miles of Kikuyu station. Most of the scrub thereabouts was castor-oil plant, that makes very poor fuel; yet there were lions in plenty that roared and scouted around us even before the tents were pitched so that we yearned for fires like frozen men.

Nobody got much sleep that night, although the porters were perfectly indifferent to the risk of snoozing on the watch. Kazimoto produced a thing called a *kiboko*—a whip of hippopotamus hide a yard and a half long, and what with that and Will's good humor we constituted a yelling brigade, whose business was to make the welkin ring with godless noises whenever a lion came close enough to be dangerous.

I made up a signal-party of all our personal boys with all our lanterns, swinging them in frantic patterns in the darkness in a way to terrify the very night itself. Fred played his concertina nearly all night long, and when dawn came, though there were tracks of lions all about the camp, we were only tired and sleepy. Nobody was missing; nobody killed.

We never again took lions so seriously, although we always built fires about the camp in lion country when that was possible. Partly by dint of carelessness that brought no ill results and partly from observation, we learned that, where game is plentiful, lions are more curious than dangerous. Unless something should happen to enrage them or the game has gone away and they are hungry, they are likely to let well alone.

If there are dogs in camp—and we bought three terrier pups that morning from a settler at Kikuyu—leopards are likely to be much more troublesome than lions. Leopards like dog meat as Brown of Lumbwa liked whisky.

We took Brown's supply of whisky from him before the start next day, locked it up with our own, sent him ahead in the hammock and kept him at work as guide by promises of whisky for supper if he did his duty and threats of mere cold water if he failed.

"But water rots my stomach!" he objected.

"Lead on, then!" was the invariable, remorseless answer.

So Brown led.

Until we reached Naivasha, with its strange lake full of hippo at an elevation so great that the mornings are frosty—and that within sight of the line—there was never a day that we were once out of sight of game from dawn to dark. When we awoke, the morning mist would scatter slowly and betray sleepy herds of antelope that would rise leisurely, stand staring at us, suddenly become suspicious and then gallop off until the whole plain was a panorama of wheeling herds, reminding one of the cavalry maneuvers at Aldershot when the Guards regiments were pitted against the regular cavalry—all riding and no wits.

Although we had to shoot enough meat for ourselves and men, we never once took advantage of those surprize parties in the early morning, preferring to stalk warier game at the end of a long march. The rains were a thing of the past, and we seldom troubled to pitch tents but slept under the stars with a sensation that the universe was one vast place of peace.

Occasionally we reached an elevation from which we could look down and see men toiling to build the railway that already reached Nyanza, after the unfinished fashion of work whose chief aim is to make a showing. Profits, performances were secondary matters; that railway's one purpose was to establish occupation of the headwaters of the Nile and refute the German claim to prior rights there.

At irregular intervals trains already went down to the lake, and passengers might ride on suffrance; but we deluded ourselves with the belief that by marching we threw enemies off the scent. It was pure delusion but extremely pleasant while it lasted. Where Africa is green and high, she is a pleasant land to march across.

Brown grew sober on the trip, as if approaching his chosen home gave him a sense of responsibility. His own reason for preferring the march to a ride in a construction train was simple:

"Every favor you ask o' Gov'ment, boys, leaves one less to fall back on in a pinch! Ask not, and they'll forget some o' your peccadillos. Ask too often, and one day, when you really need a kindness, you'll find the Bank o' Good Hope busted! And, believe me, boys, that 'ud be a —— of a predicament for a poor sufferin' settler to find himself in!"

The approach to Lumbwa was over steep, hilly grass-land between forests of cedar—perfect country, kept clean by a wind that smelled of fern and clover.

"You can tell we're gettin' near my place," said Brown, "by the number o' leopards that's about."

We had to keep our three pups close at heel all the time, and even at that we lost two of them. One was taken from between Will's feet as he sat in camp cleaning his rifle. All he heard was the dog's yelp, and all he saw was a flash of yellow as the leopard made for the boulders close at hand. The other was taken out of my tent. I had tied it to the tent-pole, but the stout cord snapped like a hair, and the darkness swallowed both leopard and its prey before I could as much as reach my rifle to get a shot.

"Splendid country for farmin'," Brown remarked. "Splendid. On'y, you can't keep sheep because the leopards take 'em. An' you can't keep hens for the same reason. Nor yet cows, because the leopards get the calves—leastways, that's to say, unless you watch out awful cautious. Nor yet you can't keep pigeons, 'cause the leopards take them too. I sent to England for fancy pigeons—a dozen of 'em.

"Leopards got all but one; so I put him in the loft above my own house, where it seemed to me 'tweren't possible for a leopard to get, supposin' he'd dared. Went away the next day for some shootin', an' lo and behold—came back that evenin' to discover my cook an' three others carryin' on as if Kingdom Come had took place at last. Never heard or saw such a jamboree. The blamed leopard was up in the loft and had eaten the pigeon, feathers an' all, but couldn't get out again!

"What happened? Nothin'! I was that riled I didn't stop to think—fixed a bayonet on the old Martini the Gov'ment supplies to settlers out of the depths of its wisdom an' generosity—climbed up by the same route the leopard took—invaded him—an' skewered him wi' the bayonet in the dark! I wouldn't do it again for a kingdom—but I won't buy more pigeons, either!"

"What do you raise on your farm, then—pigs?" we asked.

"No; the leopards take pigs."

"What then?"

"Well—as I was explainin' to that Greek, Georges Coutlass, at Nairobi, there's a way of farmin' out your cattle among the natives that beats keepin' 'em yourself. The natives put 'em in the village pen o' nights; an', besides, they know all about the business. All you need do is give 'em a heifer calf once in a while, and they're contented. I keep a herd o' two hundred cows in a native village not far from my place. The natural increase o' them will make me well-to-do some day."

The day before we reached Brown's tiny homestead, we heard a lot of shooting over the hill behind us.

"That'll be railway men takin' a day off after leopards," announced Brown with the air of a man who can not be mistaken.

NEVERTHELESS, Fred and I went back to see but could make out nothing. We lay on the top of the hill and watched for two or three hours, but, although we heard rifle-firing repeatedly, we did not once catch sight of smoke or men. We marched into camp late that night with a feeling of foreboding that we could not explain but that troubled us both equally.

Once or twice in the night we heard firing again, as if somebody's camp not very far away was invaded by leopards or, perhaps, lions. Yet at dawn there was no sign of tents. And, when that night we arrived at Brown's homestead, we seemed to have the whole world to ourselves.

Brown's house was a tiny wooden affair with a thick grass roof. It boasted a big fireplace at one end of the living-room and a chimney that Brown had built himself—so cunningly that smoke could go up but no leopards could come down.

He got very drunk that night to celebrate the homecoming and stayed completely drunk for three days, we making use of his barn to give our porters a good rest. By day we shot enough meat for the camp, and at night we sat over the log-fire, praying that Brown might sober up, Fred singing songs to his infernal concertina, and all the natives who could crowd in the doorway listening to him with all their ears. Fred made vast headway in native favor and learned a lot of two languages at once.

Every day we sent Kazimoto and another boy exploring among the Lumbwa tribe, gathering information as to routes and villages. And it was Kazimoto who came running in breathless one night, just as Brown was at last sobering up, with the news that some Greeks had swooped down on Brown's cattle, had killed two or three of the villagers who herded them and had driven the whole herd away southward.

That news sobered Brown completely. He took the bottle of whisky he had just brought up from the cellar and replaced it unopened.

"There's on'y one Greek in the world knew where my cattle were!" he announced grimly. "There's on'y one Greek I ever talked to about cattle. Coutlass, by the great hornspoon! The blackguard swore he was after you chaps—swore he didn't care nothing about me! What he did to you was none o' my business, o' course—an' I figured, anyway, as you could look out for yourselves. Not that I told the swine any o' your business, mind! Not me! I was so sure he was gunnin' for you that I told him my own business to throw him off your track! And now the devil goes an' turns on me!"

He got down his rifle and began overhauling it feverishly, yet with a deliberate care that was astonishing in a man so recently drunk. While he cleaned and oiled, he gave orders to his own boys; and what with having servants of our own and having to talk to them mostly in the native tongue, we were able to understand pretty well the whole of what he said.

"You're not going to start after them tonight?" Fred objected.

But he and Will were also already overhauling weapons for the second time that evening. It is religion with the true hunter never to eat supper until his rifle is cleaned and oiled. I got my own rifle down from the shelf over Brown's stone mantelpiece.

"What d'you take me for?" demanded Brown. "There's one pace they'll go at, an' that's the fastest possible. There's one place they'll head for, an' that's German East. They can't march faster than the cattle, an' the cattle 'll have to eat. Maybe they'll drive 'em all through the first night and on into the next day, but after that they'll have to rest 'em and graze 'em a while. That's when we'll begin to gain. The tireder the cattle get, the faster we'll overhaul 'em—for we can eat while we're marching', which the cattle can't. You chaps just stay here an' look after my farm till I come back!"

"You mean you propose to go alone after them?" asked Fred.

"Why not? Whose cattle are they?"

He was actually disposed to argue the point.

"Man alive, there'll be shootin'!" he insisted. "If they once get over the border with all those cattle, the Germans 'll never hand 'em over until every head o' cattle's gone. They'll fine 'em an' arrest 'em an' trick 'em an' fine 'em again until the Germans own the herd all legal an' proper—an' then they'll chase the Greeks back to British East for punishment same as they always do. What good 'ud that be to me? No, no! Me—I'm going to catch 'em this side o' the line or else bu'st—an' I won't be too partic'lar where the line's drawn, either!

"There's maybe a hundred miles to the south o' their line that the Germans don't patrol more often that once in a leap-year. If I catch them Greeks in any o' that country, I'm going to kid myself deliberate that it's British East and act accordin'!"

At last we convinced him—although I don't remember how, for he was obstinate from the aftermath of whisky—that we would no more consider permitting him to go alone than he would consider abandoning his cattle. Then we had to decide who should follow with our string of porters, for, if forced marching was in order, it was obvious that we should far outdistance our train.

We invited Brown to follow with all the men while we three skirmished ahead, but he waxed so apoplectically blasphemous at the very thought of it that Fred assured him the proposal was intended for a joke. Then we argued among ourselves, coaxed, blarneyed, persuaded and tried to bribe one another. Finally, all else failing, we tossed a coin for it, odd man out. Fred lost.

So Brown, Will Yerkes and I, with Kazimoto, our two personal servants and six boys to carry one tent for the lot of us and food and cooking-pots, started off just as the moon rose over the nearest cedars and laughed at Fred marshaling the sleepy porters by lamplight in the open space between the house and barn. He was to follow as fast as the loaded porters could be made to travel, and, with that concertina of his to spur them on, there was little likelihood of losing touch. But the rearguard, when it comes to pursuing a retreating enemy, is ever the least alluring place.

"You've got all the luck," he shouted. "Make the most of it, or I'll never gamble on the fall of a coin again!"

Before we had gone a mile in the dark, we stood in doubt as to whether the most practicable trail went right or left. Brown set his own indecision down frankly to the whisky that had muddled him. Even Kazimoto, who had passed that way three times, did not know for certain. So I went forward to scout—stepped into the deep shadow of some jungle—trod on nothing—threw the other foot forward to save myself—and fell downard into blackness for an eternity.

I brought up at last unhurt in the trash and decaying vegetation at the bottom of a pit dug years ago for elephants. I looked up to see the stars above me in a rough parallelogram, whose edge I guessed was more than thirty feet above my head. I started to dig my way out, but the crumbling sides fell in and threatened to bury me alive unless I kept still. So I shouted until my lungs ached, but without result. I suppose the noise went trumpeting upward out of the hole and away to the clouds and the stars. At any rate, Will and Brown swore afterward they never heard it.

I was fifteen minutes in the hole, that very likely had held many an elephant with his legs wedged together under him until the poor brute perished of thirst, before it occurred to me to fire my rifle. I fired several shots when I did think of it; but we had agreed on no system of signals, and, instead of coming to find me at once, the other two cursed me for wasting time shooting at leopards in the dark instead of scouting for the track.

I used twenty cartridges before they came to see what sort of battle I was waging, and with the last shot I nearly blew Brown's helmet off as he stooped over the hole to look down in.

Then there were more precious minutes wasted while some one cut a long pole for me to swarm up, and at the end of that time, when I stood on firm ground at last and wiped the blood from hands and knees, we were no wiser about the proper direction to take.

AT NOON next day we found the track of the driven cattle and soon after that came on the half-devoured carcass of a heifer that the Greeks had shot, presumably because it could not march and perhaps with the added reason that freshly killed meat would draw off leopards and hyenas and provide peace for a few miles.

Once on the trail it would not have been easy to lose it, except in the dark, for the driven cattle had smashed down the undergrowth in addition to leaving deep hoofprints at every watercourse.

Once a dozen buffalo stampeded our tiny column. Our five porters dropped their loads, and the biggest old bull mistook our only tent for our captain's dead body and proceeded to play ball with it, tossing it and tearing it to pieces until at last Will got a chance for a shoulder shot and drilled him neatly. Two other bulls took to fighting in the midst of the excitement, and we got both of them. Then the rest trotted off; so we packed the horns of the dead ones on the head of our free porter—for the tent he had carried was now utterly no use—and hastened on.

Once, in trying to make a cut that should have saved us ten or fifteen miles between two rivers, we fell shoulder deep into a bog and only escaped after an hour's struggle, during which we all but lost two porters. We had to retrace our steps and follow the Greeks' route, only to have the mortification of seeing Fred and our column of supplies coming over the top of a rise not eight miles behind us.

Determined not to be overtaken by him, we dispensed with sleep altogether for that night and nearly got drowned at the second river.

We found a native who owned a thing he called a *mtungi*—a near-canoe, burned out of a tree-trunk. He assured us the ford was very winding—he drew a wiggly finger-mark in the mud by way of illustration—but that his boat would hold twice our number and that he could take us over easily in the dark.

He also said that he had taken the cattle over by the ford early that morning and then had crossed over in the boat with two Greeks and a *Bwana Goa*. He showed us the brass wire and beads they gave him in proof of that statement.

So we all piled into his crazy boat with our belongings, and he promptly lost the way amid the twelve-foot papyrus that divided the river into countless narrow streams and afforded protection to savagely hungry mosquitoes. Our faces and hands were wet with blood in less than two minutes.

Presently, instead of finding bottom for his pole, he pushed us into deep water. The grass disappeared, and a ripple on the water lipping dangerously within three inches of our uneven gunwale proved that we were more or less in the main stream. We had enjoyed that sensation for about a minute and were headed toward where we supposed the opposite bank must be when a hippo in a hurry to breathe blew just beside us—saw, smelled or heard us—it was all one to him—and dived again.

I suppose in order to get his head down fast enough he shoved his rump up, and his great fat back made a wave that ended that voyage abruptly. Our three inches of broadside vanished. The canoe rocked violently, filled, turned over and floated wrong side up.

"All the same," laughed Will, spluttering and spitting dirty water, "here's where the crocks get fooled! They don't eat me for supper!"

He was first on top of the overturned boat, and dragged me up after him. Together we hauled up Brown, who could not swim but was bombastically furious and unafraid; and the three of us pulled out the porters and the fatuous boat's owner. The pole was floating near by, and I swam down-stream and fetched it. When they had dragged me back on to the wreck, the moon came out, and we saw the far bank hazily through mist and papyrus.

The boat floated far more steadily wrong side up, perhaps because we had lashed all our loads in place and they acted as ballast. Will took the pole and acted the part of Charon, our proper pilot contenting himself with perching on the rear end, lamenting the ill-fortune noisily until Kazimoto struck him and threatened to throw him back into the water.

"They don't want a fool like you in the other world," he assured him. "You will die of old age!"

THE papyrus inshore was high enough to screen the moon from us, and we had to hunt a passage through it in pitch darkness. Then, having found the muddy bank at last—and more trillions of mosquitoes—we had to drag the overturned boat out high and dry to rescue our belongings. And that was ticklish work because of the crocodiles; practically all the largest ones spend the night alongshore.

Matches were wet. We had no means of making a flare to frighten the monsters away. We simply had to "chance it" as cheerfully and swiftly as we could, and at the end of a half-hour's slimy toil we carried our muddied loads to the nearest high ground and settled down there for the night.

It would be mad exaggeration to say we camped. Wet to the skin—dirty to the verge of feeling suicidal—bitten by insects until the blood ran down from us—lost—for we had no notion where the end of the ford might be—at the mercy of any prowling beasts that might discover us—for our rifle locks were fouled with mud—we sat with chattering teeth and waited for the morning.

When the sun rose, we found a village less than four hundred yards away and sent the boys down to it to unpack the loads and spread everything in the sun to dry while we went down to the river again and washed our rifles. Then we dried and oiled them and, without a word of bargain or explanation, invaded the cleanest-looking hut, lay down on the stamped clay floor and slept. It was only clean-looking, that hut. It housed more myriads of fleas than the air outside supported "skeeters," but we slept unconscious of them all.

At four that afternoon we had the mortification of being roused by Fred's voice and the dumping of loads as his sixty porters dropped their burdens inside the village stockade. He had found a ford and come over on foot, making a prodigious splash to keep crocodiles away, and was as full of life and fun as a schoolboy on vacation.

We took another tent from among Fred's loads, changed two of our porters for stronger ones and went forward that afternoon—for it began to be obvious that the speed had been telling on the cattle. We passed two more dead heifers within a few miles of the river bank, and there were other signs that we were gaining on them.

We marched that night until midnight, slept until dawn and were off again. At noon we reached rising ground, and Kazimoto ran ahead of us to the summit. We saw him standing at gaze for three or four minutes with one hand shading his eyes. Then he came scampering back as excited as if his own fortune were in the balance.

"*Hooko - chini!*" he shouted. "*Hooko-chini—mba-a-a-li sana!* (They're down below there—very far away!)"

We hurried up-hill, but for many minutes we could see nothing except a plain of waving grass higher than a man's head and almost as impenetrable as bamboo, that would be a holocaust in the dry season, when the heat set fire to the grass, and was an insect-haunted marsh at most other times. However, path across it there must be, for the Greeks had driven Brown's cattle that way that very morning. And Kazimoto swore he could see them in the distance, although Brown and Will and I—all three keen-sighted—could see nothing whatever but immeasurable, worthless waving grass.

At last I detected a movement near the horizon that did not synchronize with the wind-blown motion of the rest. I pointed it out to the others, and after a few minutes we agreed that it moved against the wind.

"They're hurrying again," said Brown, peering under both hands. "There's no feed for cattle on all this plain. They're racing to get to short grass before the cattle all die."

The heat was that of an oven. The water—what there was of it in the holes and swampy places—stank and tasted acrid. The flies seemed to greet us as their only prospect of food that year. The monotony of hurrying through grass stems that cut off all view and only showed the sky through a waving curtain overhead was more nerve-trying than the physical weariness and thirst.

We slept a night in that grass, burning some of it for a smudge to keep mosquitoes at bay, and an hour after dawn we realized that we had our quarry within reach at last.

THEY were out in the open on short, good grazing. The Greeks' tent was pitched. We could see their mules, like brown insects, tied under a tree, and the cattle dotted here and there, some lying down, some feeding.

"At last!" said Brown. "Boys they're our meat! There's a tree to hang the Greeks and the Goa to! When we've done that, if you'll all come back with me, I'll send to Nairobi for an extra jar of Irish whisky, and we'll have a spree at Lumbwa that'll make the fall of Rome sound like a Sunday-school picnic! We're in German territory now, all right. There's not a white man for a hundred miles in any direction—except your friend that's coming along behind. There's nobody to carry tales or prevent! I'm no savage. I'm no degenerate. I don't hold with too much of anything, but——"

"There'll be no dirty work, if that's what you mean," said Will quietly.

Brown stared hard at him.

"D'you mean you'll object to hanging 'em?"

"Not in the least. We hang or shoot cattle-thieves in the States. I said there'll be no dirty work, that's all."

"Shall we rest a while and come on them fresh in the morning?" I proposed.

"Forward!" snorted Brown. "What d'you want to wait for?"

"Forward it is!" agreed Will. "When we get a bit closer, we'll stop and hold council of war."

"One minue!" said I. "Tell me what that is?"

I had been searching the whole countryside, looking for some means of stealing on the marauders unawares and finding none. They had chosen their camping-place very wisely from the point of view of men ununwilling to be taken by surprize. Far away over to our right, appearing and disappearing as I watched them, were a number of tiny black dots in a sort of wide half-moon formation and a larger number of rather larger dots contained within the semicircle.

"Cattle!" exploded Brown.

"And men!" added Will.

"Black men!" said I. "Black men with spears!"

"Masai!" said Kazimoto excitedly. He had far the keenest eyes of all of us.

We were silent for several minutes. The veriest stranger in that land knows about the feats and bravery of the Masai.

"*Mbaia cabisa!*" muttered Kazimoto, meaning very bad indeed.

And he had right to know.

The Masai, in accordance with time-honored custom, had come from British East to raid the lake shore villages of German territory and were driving back the plundered cattle. None can drive cattle as Masai can. They can take leg-weary beasts by the tail and make them gallop, one beast encouraging the next until they all go like the wind.

For food they drink hot blood, opening a vein in a beast's neck and closing it again when they have had their fill. Their only luggage is a spear. Their only speed-limit the maximum the cattle can be stung to. On a raid three hundred and sixty miles in six days is an ordinary rate of traveling.

Just now they did not seem in much hurry. They had probably butchered the fighting men of all the villages in their rear and were well informed as to the disposition of the nearest German forces. There was no telegraph in all those parts. To notify Muanza by runner and from there to Bagamoyo on the coast by wire would take several days. Then Bagamoyo would have to wire the station at Kilimanjaro, and there was no earthly chance of Germans intercepting them before they could reach British East.

"Masai not talking. Masai using spear and kill!" remarked Kazimoto.

"One good thing our Gov'ment's done," said Brown. "Just one. It has kept those rascals from owning rifles! But lordy! They've got spears that give a man the creeps to see!"

He began looking to his rifle. So did Will and I.

"Now this here is my fight," he explained. "Them's my cattle. They're all the wealth I own in the world. If I lose 'em, I'm minded to die, anyhow. There's nothing in life for a drunkard like me with all his money gone and nothing to do but take a mean white's job. You chaps just wait here an' watch while I 'tend to my own affairs."

"Exactly!" Will answered dryly. "I've a hundred rounds in my pockets. That ought to be enough."

While we made ready, leaving our loads and porters in a safe place and giving the boys orders, I saw two things happen. First, the Masai became aware of the little Greek encampment and the several hundred head of cattle waiting at their mercy. Second, the Greeks grew aware of the Masai.

The Greeks had boys with them; I saw at least half a dozen go scattering to round up the cattle. The tents began to come down, and I saw three figures that might be the Greeks and the Goanese holding a consultation near the tree.

"And now," remarked Will, "I begin to see the humor in this comedy. Which are we—allies of the Greeks or of the Masai? Are we to help the Greeks get away with Brown's cattle, or are we to help the Masai steal 'em from the Greeks? Are your cattle all branded, Brown?"

"You blooming well bet they are!"

"Masai know enough to alter a brand?"

"Never heard o' their doing it."

"Then, if the Masai get away with them to British East and you can find 'em, you can claim 'em, eh?"

"Claim 'em in court wi' the whole blooming tribe o' Masai—more'n a quarter of a million of 'em—all on hand to swear they bought 'em from me—an' the British Gov'ment taking sides with the black men, as it always does? Oh, yes! That sounds easy, that does!"

"But, if the Greeks get away with 'em," argued Yerkes, "you've no chance of recovering at all."

"I'll not take sides with Masai—even against Greeks!" Brown answered grimly, and Will laughed.

"If we attack the Greeks first," I said, "perhaps they'll run. We're nearer to them than the Masai are. The Masai will have to corral their own cattle before they can leave them to raid a new lot. We can open fire at long-range to begin with. If that scares the Greeks away, then we can round up Brown's cattle and drive them back northward. We may possibly escape with them too quickly for the Masai to think it worth while to follow."

Brown laughed cynically.

"We can try it," he said. "An', if the Greeks don't run pretty quick, they'll never run again—I'll warrant that!"

Nobody had a better plan to propose, so we emptied our pockets of all but fifty rounds of ammunition each and gave the rest to Kazimoto to carry, with orders to keep in hiding and watch and run with cartridges to whoever should first need them.

Then, because instead of corraling their cattle the Masai were already dividing themselves into two parties, one of which drove the cattle forward and the other diverged to study the attack, we ducked down under a ridge and ran toward the Greeks. The sooner we could get the first stage of the fighting off our hands, the better.

It proved a long way—far longer than I expected, and the going was rougher. Moreover, the Greeks' boys were losing no time about rounding up the cattle. By the time they were ready to make a move, we were still more than a mile away and out of breath.

"If they go south," panted Brown, throwing himself down by a clump of grass to gasp for his third or fourth wind, "the Masai 'll catch 'em sure, an' we'll be out o' the running! Lord send they head 'em back toward British East!"

He was in much the worst physical condition because of the whisky, but his wits were working well enough. The Greeks, on the other hand, seemed undecided and appeared to be arguing. Then Brown's prayer was answered. The Greeks' boys decided the matter for them by stampeding the herd northward toward us. They did not come fast. They were lame and bone-weary from hard driving, but they knew the way home again and made a beeline. Within a minute they were spread fanwise between us and the Greeks, making a screen we could not shoot through.

"Scatter to right and left!" Brown shouted. "Get round the wings!"

* * *

BUT what was the use? He was in the center, and short-winded. Men in usually similar positions shout wild advice. I climbed on an ant-hill.

"The Greeks are on the run!" I said. "They are headed southward! They've abandoned the cattle! They're off with their tent and belongings due south!"

"The cowards!" swore Brown very

bitterly and with such obvious disappointment that Will and I laughed.

"Laugh all you like!" he said. "I've a long job on my hands! I'll have revenge on 'em if it takes the rest o' my life! I'll follow 'em to hell-an'-gone!"

"Meanwhile," I said, still standing on the ant-hill, "the Masai are following the cattle! They're smoking this way in two single columns of about twenty spears in each. The remainder are driving their own cattle about due eastward so as to be out of the way of trouble."

"All right," said Brown, growing suddenly cheerful again. "Then it'll be a rear-guard action. Let the cattle through, and open fire behind 'em! Send that Kazimoto o' yours to warn our boys to round 'em up and drive 'em slow and steady northward!"

Kazimoto ran back and gave the necessary orders. He lost no time about it but returned panting and lay down in a hollow behind us with cartridges in either fist and a grin on his face that would have done credit to a circus clown. I never anywhere saw any one more pleased than Kazimoto at the prospect of a fight.

We let the cattle through and lay hidden, waiting for the raiders. They were in full war-dress, which is to say as nearly naked as possible except for their spears, a leg ornament made from the hair of the colobus monkey, a leather apron hung on just as suited the individual wearer's fancy, a great shield and an enormous ostrich-feather head-dress. They seemed in no hurry, for they probably guessed that the cattle would stop to graze again when the first scare was over; yet they came along as smoke comes, swiftly and easily, making no noise.

Suddenly those in the lead caught sight of our boys getting behind the cattle to herd them northward. They halted to hold consultation—apparently decided that they had only unarmed natives to deal with—and came on again faster than before.

"Better open fire now!" said Brown, when they were still a quarter of a mile away.

"Wait till you can see their eyes!" Will advised.

"This ain't a long range!" Brown objected. "Watch me startle 'em! My sight's fixed at four hundred. Watch!"

He fired—we wished he had not. The leading Masai of the right-hand column jerked his head sideways as the whistling bullet passed, and then there was nothing for it but to follow his lead and blaze for all we were worth. If Brown had been willing to accept Will's advice, there is nothing more likely than that the close-quarter surprize would have won the day for us. We would have done much more execution with three volleys at ten-yard range. As it was, we all missed with our first shots, and the Masai took heart and charged in open order.

The worst of it was that, although we dropped several of them, now the others had a chance to discover there were only three of us. Their leader shouted. The right-hand column continued to attack but changed its tactics. The left-hand party made a circuit at top speed, outflanked us and pursued the cattle.

Will brought another man down; I saw the blood splash on his forehead as the bullet drilled the skull clearly. Then one man shouted, and they all lay prone, beginning to crawl toward us with their shields held so as to make their exact position merest guesswork.

I fell back and took position on the ant-hill from which I had first seen them, thus making our position triangular and giving myself a chance to protect the other two should they feel forced to retire. The extra height also gave me a distinct advantage, for I could see the legs of the Masai over the tops of their shields and was able to wound more than one of them so severely that they crawled to the rear.

But the rest came on. Kazimoto began to be busy supplying cartridges. In that first real pinch we were in, he certainly lived up to all Courtney had said of him, for without the stimulus of his proper master's eye he neither flinched nor faltered but crawled from one to the other, dividing the spare rounds equally.

The Masai began to attempt to outflank us, but my position on the ant-hill to the rear made that impossible; they found themselves faced by a side of the triangle from whichever side they attacked. But, in turning to keep an eye on the flank, I became aware of a greater danger. The cattle were coming back. That meant that the other Masai were coming, too, and that in a few moments we were likely to be overwhelmed. I shouted to Will and Brown, but either they did not hear me or did not have time to answer.

I fired half a dozen shots and then distinctly heard the crack of a rifle from beyond the cattle. That gave matters the worst turn yet. If one of the raiders had a rifle, then, unless I could spot him at once and put him out of action, our cause was likely lost. I stood up to look for him and heard a wild cheer, followed by three more shots in quick succession.

Then I saw Fred Oakes running along a depression in the ground, followed at a considerable distance by the advance-guard of his porters. He was running and then kneeling to fire—running and kneeling again. And he was not wasting ammunition. He was much the best shot of us all, now that Monty was absent.

The terrified cattle stampeded past us, too wild to be checked by any noise. Seeing them—and sure now of their booty—the party attacking us hauled off and took to their heels. Yerkes and Brown were for speeding them with bullets in the rear, but I yelled again and this time made myself heard. Those who had got behind the cattle and were driving them were coming on with spears and shields raised to slay us in passing.

Will and Brown came and stood by me on that ant-hill. The Masai charged us—seven or eight of them. Three bit the dust, but the rest came on; and, if it had not been for two swift shots from Fred's rifle in the very nick of time, we should have all been dead men.

As it was, one seized me by the knees, and we went over together, rolling down the ant-hill, he slashing at me with his great broad-bladed spear, I holding his wrist with one hand and with the other fist belaboring him in the face. He was stronger than I—greasier—sweatier—harder to hold. He slipped from under me, rolled on top, wrenched his wrist free and in another second grinned in my face as, with both knees on my stomach, he raised the spear to kill. I shut my eyes. I had not another breath left, nor an effort in me, but I thought I could deny him the pleasure of watching my death-agony.

But I could not keep my eyes shut. Opening them to see why he did not strike, I saw Kazimoto with my rifle in both hands swing for his skull with the full weight of the butt and all his strength. Kazimoto grunted. The Masai half turned his head at the sound. The butt bit home—broke off—and my face and breast were deluged with blood and brains.

When I had wiped off that mess with Kazimoto's help, I saw Fred and Will and Brown pursuing the retreating Masai, kneeling to shoot every few yards, at every other shot or so bringing down a victim, but being rapidly outdistanced. Cattle are all the Masai care about. They had the cattle. They had hold of tails and were making the whole herd scamper due east, where they no doubt knew of a trail not on maps. They made no attempt to defend themselves—left their dead lying—and ran. I saw two or three wounded ones riding on cows, and no doubt some of those who ran holding to the cows' tails were wounded, too.

I was useless now as far as fighting was concerned, for the butt of my rifle was broken clean off at the grip. But I ran on, and heard Brown shout:

"Shoot cattle! Don't let the brutes get away with them all!"

He was shooting cows himself when I came up, but Fred stopped him.

"Never mind that, old man. Our time's our own. We'll get your cattle back, never fear. Dead ones are no use."

Brown began to blubber. Whisky had not left him manhood enough to see his whole available resources carried away before his eyes, and he broke down. It was neither agreeable nor decent to watch, and I turned away, feeling sick myself from the pressure of the Masai's knees on my stomach. That and the sun and the long march and hunger—for we had not stopped to eat a meal that day—combined to persuade me that a rest on the grass was the best thing imaginable, and I hunted about for a soft place and a little shade. It happened that Fred Oakes was watching me, suspecting me of sunstroke.

I saw a clump of rushes that gave shade enough. I hurried, for I was feeling deathly sick now. As I reached the grass, my knees began giving under me. I staggered but did not quite fall.

THAT and Fred's watchfulness saved my life, for, at the moment that my head and shoulders gave the sudden forward lurch, a wounded Masai jumped out of the rushes and drove with his spear at my breast. The blade passed down my back and slit my jacket.

He sprang back and made another lunge at me, but Fred's rifle barked at the same second, and he fell over sideways, driving the spear into my leg in his death-spasm.

The twenty minutes following that are the worst in my memory. Kazimoto broke the gruesome news that the spear blade was almost surely poisoned—dipped in gangrene. The Masai are no believers in wounded enemies or mercy on the battle-field.

We doubted the assertion. Kazimoto grew indignant and offered to prove the truth of his claim on some animal. But there was no living animal in sight on which to prove it. We asked him how long gangrene, injected in that way, took to kill a man.

"Very few minutes!" he answered.

Then it occurred that none of us knew what to do. Kazimoto announced that he knew and offered to make good at once if given permission. He demanded permission again and again from each one of us, making me especially repeat my words. Then he gathered stems of grass a third of an inch thick from the bed of a tiny watercourse and proceeded to make a tiny fire, talking in a hurry, as he did it, to several of Fred's string of porters who were now arriving on the scene.

While I watched with a sort of tortured interest what he was doing at the fire, five of the largest boys with whom he had been speaking rushed me from behind and, before I could struggle or even swear, had me pinned out on my back on the ground. One sat on my head; one on my poor bruised stomach; the others held wrists and ankles in such way that I could not break free or even kick much however hard I tried.

Then Kazimoto came with glowing ends of grass from the fire, blowing on them to keep them cherry-red, and inserted one after another into the open spear wound. I could not cry out, because of the man sitting on my face; but I could bite. And to the everlasting credit of the man—Ali bin Yema, his name was—be it written that he neither spoke nor moved a muscle, although my front teeth met together in his rump.

I do not know how long the process lasted or how many times Kazimoto returned to the fire for more of his sizzling sticks, for I fainted; and, when I came round, the agony was still too intense to permit interest in anything but agony. They had my leg bandaged—how and with what I neither knew nor cared. And it was evident that, unless they chose to leave me in camp where I was, they would have to abandon all thought of pursuing Masai for the present. Even Brown saw the force of that, and he was the first to refuse flatly to leave me there.

For a while they hunted through the grass for more wounded men, but they found none. There must have been several, but they probably feared the sort of mercy from us that they habitually gave to their own enemies and crawled away—in all likelihood to die of thirst and hunger, unless some beast of prey should smell them out and make an earlier end.

Then there was consultation. It was decided a doctor for me was the most urgent need; that Muanza, the largest German station on Victoria Nyanza, was probably as near as anywhere, and that, German East being our immediate destination, anyway, the best course to take was forward, roughly south by west. So I was slung in a blanket on a tent-pole, and we started, I swearing like a pirate every time a boy stumbled and jolted me. There is something in the nature of a burn that makes bad language feel like singing hymns.

The worst of the journey was the wayside villages—dirty beyond belief, governed in a crude way by a head man whom the Germans honored with the title of *sultani.* These wayside beggars—for they were no better—destitute paupers, taxed until their wits failed them in the effort to scrape together enough surplus out of which to pay—were supplied with a mockery of a crown apiece, a thing of brass and imitation plush that they wore in the presence of strangers. To add to the irony of that, the law of the land permitted any white man passing through to beat them with as many as twenty-five lashes if they failed to do his bidding.

On arriving at such a village, the first thing we did was to ask for milk. If they had any, they brought it, not daring to refuse, for fear lest a German sergeant-major should be sent along to wreak vengeance later. But it was always too dirty to drink.

That ceremony over, the head man retired, and the village sick were brought for our inspection. Gruesome sores, running ulcers, wounds and crippled limbs were stripped and exposed to our reluctant gaze. There was little we could do for them. Our own supply of medicines and bandages was almost too small for our own needs, to begin with. By the time we had passed three villages, we scarcely had enough lint and liniment left to take care of my wound; but even that scant supply we cut in half for a particularly bad case.

"Don't the Germans do anything for you?" we demanded over and over again.

The answer was always the same.

"*Germani mbaia!* (The Germans are bad!)"

They were lifeless—listless—tamed until neither ambition nor courage was left. When their cattle had brought forth young and it looked as if there might be some profit at last, the Masai came and raided them, taking away all but the very old ones and the youngest calves. The Germans, they said, taxed them and took their weapons away but gave them no protection.

At one place we passed a rifle, lying all rusted by the track. We took it along and at the next village we asked about it. They told us that a German native soldier had deserted six months before and had thrown his rifle away, and they begged us to send back and lay it where we found it, lest the Germans come and punish them for touching it. So we did that to oblige them, and they were grateful to the extent of offering us one of their only two male sheep.

I forget now for how many days we traveled across that sad and saddening land, Fred always cheerful in spite of everything, Will more angry at each village with its dirt and sores, Brown moaning always about his lovely herd of cows, and I groaning oftener than not.

My leg grew no better, what with jolting and our ignorance of how to treat it. Sometimes, in efforts to obtain relief, I borrowed a cow at one village and rode it to the next, but a cow is a poor mount and takes as a rule unkindly to the business. Now and then I tried to walk for a while on crutches that Fred made for me, but most of the time I was carried in a blanket that grew hotter and more comfortless as day dragged after day.

At last, however, we topped a low rise and saw Muanza lying on the lake shore, with the great island of Ukerewe to the northward in the distance. From where we first glimpsed it, it was a tidy, tree-shaded, pleasant-looking place, with a square fort and a big house for the commandant on a rise overlooking the town.

"Now we'll wire Monty at last!" said Fred.

"Now we'll shave and wash and write letters!" said Will.

"Now at last for a doctor!" said I. "I've been told that the Heinie doctors know their trade."

VII

When Kenia's peak glows gold and rose,
A dawn breeze whispers to the plain
With breath cooled sweet by mountain snows,
"The darkness soon shall come again!"
Stirs then the sleepless, lean Masai
And stands o'er plain and peak at gaze,
Resentful of the bright'ning sky,
Impatient of the white man's days.

Oh, dark nights, when the charcoal glowed and falling hammers rang!
When *fundis** forged the spear blades, and the warriors danced and sang!
When the marriageable spearmen gathered, calling each to each,
Telling over proverbs that the tribal wise men teach,
Brother promising blood-brother partnership in weal and wo,
Nightlong stories of the runners come from spying on the foe,
Nights of boasting by the thorn-fire of the coming tale of slain,
Oh, the times before the English! When will those times come again?

Oh, the days and nights of raiding, when the feathered spearman strode
With the hide shields on their forearms, and the wild Nyanza road
Grew blue with smoking villages, grew red with flaring roofs,
Grew noisy with the shouting and the thunder of the hoofs
As we drove the plundered cattle—when we burned the night with haste—
When we leaped at dawn from ambush—when we laid the *shambas* waste!
Oh, the new spears dipped in life-blood as the women shrieked in vain!
Oh, the days before the English! When will those days come again?

Oh, the homeward road in triumph with the plunder borne along
On the heads of taken women! Oh, the laughter and the song!
Oh, the tusks of yellow ivory—the *frasilas* of beads—
And, best of all, the heifers that the marriageable needs!
The yells when village eyes at last our sky-line feathers see

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* *Fundi*—Skilled workman.

And the maidens run to count how many marriages shall be—
Ten heifers to a maiden (and the chief's girl stands for twain)
Oh, the days before the English! When will those days come again?

Now the fat herds grow in number, and the old are rich in trade,
Now the grass grows green and heavy where the six-foot spears were made.
Now the young men walk to market, and the wives have beads and wire—
Brass and iron—glass and cowrie—past the limit of desire.
There is peace from lake to mountain, and the very zebra breed
Where a law says none may hurt them (and the wise are they who heed!)
Yea—the peace lies on the country as our herds o'erspread the plain—
But the days before the English—when shall those days come again?

When Kenia's peak glows gold and rose,
A dawn breeze whispers to the plain
With breath cooled sweet by mountain snows,
"The darkness soon shall come again!"
Stirs then the sleepless, lean Masai
And stands o'er plain and peak at gaze,
Resentful of the bright'ning sky,
Impatient of the white man's days.

The Darkness Comprehended It Not.

WHAT first looked like a pleasant place dwindled into charmlessness and insignificance as we approached Muanza.

The German blight was there. The place existed for and by leave of Government. The inhabitants were there on sufferance, and aware of it—not in the very least degree enthusiastic over German rule, but awfully appreciative.

The first thing we met of interest on entering the township was a chain-gang, fifty long, marching at top speed in step, led by a Nubian soldier with a loaded rifle, flanked by two others and pursued by a fourth. He was armed only with the hippo-hide whip, called *kiboko* by the natives, that can cut and bruise at one stroke. He plied it liberally whenever the gang betrayed symptoms of intending to slow down.

The *boma*, or fort, was down by the waterfront and formed one boundary of the drill-ground. Facing the *boma* wall was a row of Indian and Arab stores. To the north was the market building—an enormous structure of round stucco pillars supporting a great grass roof. Facing that at the southern end were the court-house, the hospital and a store owned by the *Deutsch-Oest-Afrika Gesellschaft*, known far and wide by its initials—a concern that owned the practical monopoly of wholesale import and export trade and did a retail business, too.

We went first to the hospital and sent Kazimoto into the fort with a note to the effect that a European waited in need of prompt medical treatment.

The sentry admitted Kazimoto readily enough, but he did not come out again for half an hour, and then he looked glum.

"*Habanah!*" he said simply, using the all-embracing native negative.

"Is a doctor there?"

He told us he had asked for the doctor. A soldier had pointed him out. He had placed the note in the doctor's hand.

"Did he read it?" we asked.

"Surely, and then he showed it to the other officers."

"What did they say?"

"They laughed and said nothing."

"I'll go myself," announced Will. "I can sling the German language like a barkeep. Bet you I'm back here with a doctor inside of three minutes!"

He strode off like Sir Galahad in football shorts. But he was gone more than fifteen minutes and came back at last with his ears crimson. Nor would he answer our questions.

"Shall I go?" suggested Fred.

"Not unless you like insolence! We passed the camping-ground, it seems, on our way in. We've leave to pitch tents there. We'd better be moving."

So we trailed back the way we had come to a triangular sandy space enclosed by a cactus hedge at the junction of three roads. There were several small grass-roofed shelters with open sides in there and two tents already pitched, but we were not sufficiently interested just then to see who owned the other tents. We pitched our own—stowed the loads in one of the shelters—gave our porters money for board and rations—and sent them to find quarters in the town. Another of the shelters we took over for a kitchen, and, while our servants were cooking a meal, we four gathered in Fred's tent and began to question Will again.

"They've got a fine place in there," he said. "The officers were all sitting smoking on a veranda.

" 'Is one of you the doctor?' I asked in German, and a tall lean one with a mighty mean face turned his head to squint at me.

"'I am staff surgeon,' he answered. 'What do you want?'

"I told him, and he listened without asking a question. When I'd done, he said curtly that the hospital opens for outpatients at eight in the morning.

"Well, I piled it on then. I told him your leg was so rotten that you might not be alive tomorrow morning. He didn't even look interested. I piled it on thicker and told him about the poisoned spear. He didn't bat an eyelid or make a move. So I started in to coax him.

"I did some coaxing. Believe me, I swallowed more pride in five minutes than I guessed I owned! A ward-heeler cadging votes for a Milwaukee alderman never wheedled more gingerly. I called him 'Herr Staff Surgeon' and mentioned thewell-known skill of German medicos and the keen sense of duty of the German army and a whole lot of other stuff.

"'Tomorrow morning at eight!' was all the answer I got from him.

"I reckon it was somewhere about that time that I began to get rattled. I pulled our money and showed it. He looked the other way, and, when I went on talking, he turned his back. I suspect he didn't dare keep on lookin' at money almost within reach. Anyhow, then I opened on him, firin' both bow guns. I dared him to sit there, with a patient in need of prompt attention less than two hundred yards away. I called him names. I guaranteed to write to the German Government and the United States papers about him. I told him I'd have his job if it cost me all my money and a lifetime's trouble.

"He was just about ready to shoot—I'd just about got the red blood rising on his neck and ears—when along came the commandant—*der Herr Kapitan*—the officer commanding Muanza—a swag-bellied ruffian with a beard and a beery look in his eye, but a voice like a man falling down three stories with all the fire-irons.

"'What do you want?' he demanded in English, and I thanked him first for not having mistaken me for one of his own countrymen. Then I told him what I'd come for.

"'Tomorrow at eight o'clock!' he snapped after he'd had a word with the medico.

"I didn't come as easy as all that. I stood there telling him things until I guessed he had his craw as near full as he could stand it without having me arrested. Then I did come—whistling 'Yankee Doodle.' And say—Fred! Where's that concertina of yours?"

FRED patted it. His beloved instrument was never far from hand.

"Why don't you play all the American and English tunes you know tonight? Start off with 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic.' Let's make this camp a reg'lar—hello—see who's here!"

The tent door darkened. Brown leaped to his feet and swore.

"Gassharramminy!" said a voice we all recognized instantly. "That tune sounds good. I've lived in the States! I'm a U. S. citizen! A man can't forget his own country's tunes so easily!"

Cool and impudent, Georges Coutlass entered and, without waiting for invitation, took a seat on a load of canned food. Brown grabbed the nearest rifle—it happened to be Fred's—snapped open the breech—discovered it was loaded—and took aim. Coutlass did not even blink. He was either sure Fred and Will would interfere, or else he was at the end of his tether and indifferent to death.

"Don't be an ass, Brown!"

Fred knocked the rifle up. Will took it away and returned it to the corner.

"All very easy for you men to take high moral ground and all that sort of rot," Brown grumbled. "It's my cattle he took!"

"Use your fists all you care to!" grinned Will.

"Bah!" sneered Coutlass. "I found cattle in a village. How should I know whose cattle they were? The Masai took them from me, and they'd have taken them from you just the same! Gassharramminy! By ——! We're all in the same boat. Let's be friendly and treat one another like gentlemen.

"We're all in the power of the Germans. I and my party are under arrest. So will you be by tomorrow. I shall tell a tale tomorrow that will keep you by the heels for a month at least while they investigate. Wait and see!"

"Get out of this tent!" growled Fred.

"Presently."

Fred made a spring at him, but Coutlass was on his feet with the speed of a cat and just outisde the tent in time to avoid the swing of Fred's fist. He withdrew about two yards and stood there grinning maliciously.

"You'll be glad to make terms with me by this time tomorrow," he boasted. "By —— you'll make terms with me now, or, by —— you shall rot in a German jail until your joints creak!"

His Greek friend and the Goanese, supposing him in trouble, perhaps, came and stood in line with him. Very comfortless they looked, and of the three only Coutlass had courage of a kind.

"They stole the cattle on the British side of the border," Will said *sotto voce.* "No earthly use threatening them with German law."

"Keep away from our camp," Fred ordered them, "or take the consequences! Mr. Brown here is in no mood for pleasantries!"

"That drunkard, Brown?" roared Coutlass. "He is in no mood for—oh, haw-hah-hee-ho-ha-ha-ha! Drunkard Brown of Lumbwa wants to avenge himself, and his friends won't let him! Oh, isn't that a joke! Oh, ha-ha-ha-hee-hee-ha-ho-ho!"

His two companions made a trio of it, yelling with stage laughter like disgusting animals. Fred took a short, quick step forward. Will followed, and Brown reached for the rifle again. But I stopped all three of them.

"Come back. Don't let's be fools," I insisted. "I never saw a more obvious effort to start trouble in my life. It's a trap. Keep out of it."

"Sure enough," Will admitted. "You're right."

He returned into the tent, and the Greeks, perhaps supposing he went for weapons, retreated, continuing to shout abuse at Brown, who, between a yearning to get drunk and sorrow for his stolen cattle, was growing tearful.

"They got here first," I argued. "They've had time to tell their own story. It's perfectly obvious Coutlass wanted to start a fight. Who wants to look behind the cactus hedge and see whether he had friends in ambush.

"Drunkard Brown is on the town—on the town—on the town!" roared Coutlass and his friends.

"Oh, let me go and have a crack at 'em!" begged Brown.

Fred kept a restraining hand on him. Will left the tent and walked straight for the gap in the cactus hedge by which we had entered the enclosure. It was only twenty yards away. Once through the gap, he glanced swiftly to right and left—laughed—and came back again.

"Six full-sized Nubians in uniform with good big sticks and handcuffs! If we'd touched those Greeks, they'd have jumped the fence and stretched us out! What the devil d'you suppose they want us in jail for?"

"D'you suppose they think," I said, "that, if they had us in jail in this God-forsaken place, we'd divulge the secret of Tippoo's ivory?"

"Why don't we tell 'em the secret!" suggested Will, and that seemed such a good idea that we laughed ourselves back into good temper, except Brown.

"I want to get even with all Africa!" he grumbled. "I want to make trouble that'll last! I'd start a war this minute if I knew how. Yes, sir! And my name's Brown of Lumbwa to prove I mean what I say!"

After a while the Nubian soldiers came out of ambush and marched away. We ate supper. The Greeks and the Goanese subsided into temporary quiet, and our own boys, squatting by a fire they had placed so that they could watch the Greeks' encampment, began humming a native song. Their song reminded Fred of Will's earlier suggestion, and he unclasped the concertina.

Then for three-quarters of an hour he played, and we sang all the tunes we knew least likely to make Germans happy, repeating "The Marseillaise" and "Rule Britannia" again and again in pious hope that at least a few bars might reach to the commandant's house on the hill.

WHETHER they did or not—whether the commandant writhed, as we hoped, in the torture of supreme insult or slept, as was likely, from the after-effect of too much bottled beer with dinner—there were others who certainly did hear and made no secret of it.

All that section of Muanza, man, woman and child, came and squatted outside the cactus hedge. It was *streng polizeilich verboten* for natives to enter the European camping-ground; so, except when they wanted to steal, they absolutely never trespassed past the hedge.

Swahili and Arabs came. Indians began coming, and Greeks, until most of the inhabitants of the eastern side of town were either squatting or standing or pacing to and fro outside the camping-ground.

At last rumor of what was happening reached the D. O. A. G.—the store at a corner of the drill-ground, where it seemed the non-commissioned officers took their pleasure of an evening. Pleasure, except as laid down in regulations, is not permitted in German colonies to any except white folk. No less than eight German sergeants and a sergeant-major, all the worse for liquor, turned out as if to a fire and came down-street at a double.

They had *kibokos* in their hands. The first we heard of their approach was the *crack, crack, crack* of the black whips falling on naked or thin-cotton-clad backs and shoulders. There was no yelling—it is not allowed after dark on German soil, at least by natives—but a sudden pattering in the dust as a thousand feet hurried away. Then, in the glow of our lamplight, came the sergeant-major, standing spraddle-legged in front of us.

He was a man of medium height, in clean white uniform. The first thing I noticed about him was the high cheek-bones and murderous blue eyes, like a pig's. His general build was heavy. The fair mustache made no attempt to conceal fat lips that curled cruelly. His general air was that most offensive one, to decent folk, of the bully who would ingratiate by seeming a good fellow.

"*'Nabend, meine Herren!*" he said aggressively. "*Ich heisse Schubert—Feldwebel Hans Schubert.*"

"*Was wollen Sie?*" Will asked.

"You make fine music! *Ach!* Up at the D. O. A. G. we *Unteroffiziere* spend the evening without music at all. Will you not come and play with us?"

"I only know French and English tunes!" lied Fred.

"*Ach! Kommen Sie!* There is beer at the D. O. A. G."

"I'm going, then, for one!" announced Brown, getting up immediately.

"Listen!" continued the sergeant-major. "You gentlemen have not too many friends in Muanza! I speak in friendship. I invite you on behalf of myself and other *Unteroffiziere* to spend *gemütlich* evening with us."

"Let's go!" I said. "My leg hurts like ——! If I stay here, I can't sleep."

"Who'll watch those Greeks?" Fred demanded. "They'd as soon steal as eat!"

"*Ach!*" exclaimed Schubert. "That is all *ganz einfach!*"

He turned and shouted an order. A non-commissioned officer went running back up-street.

"You shall have three *askaris* to guard your camp. So nothing whatever shall be stolen! Then come along and make music—*Seien Sie gemütlich! Ja?*"

Brown had already gone, jingling money in his pocket. We waited until the Nubian soldiers came—saw them posted—and then walked up-street behind the sergeants, Schubert leading us all, and I limping between Fred and Will. They as good as carried me the last half of the way.

The D. O. A. G. proved a mournful-enough-looking place in which to spend convivial evenings. However, it seemed that, when the sergeant-major had decreed amusement, the non-commissioned officers' mess overlooked all trifles in brave determination to obey. They marched in, humming tunes—each a different one, and nearly all high tenor—and took seats in a room at the rear of the building with their backs against a mud-brick wall that was shiny from much rubbing by drill tunics.

Down the center was a narrow table, loaded with drinks of all sorts. A case of bottled beer occupied the place of pride at one end. Under the table was an unopened case of sweet German champagne.

"Now for *Gesang!*" shouted Schubert, knocking the neck off a bottle of beer and beginning to sing like a drunken pirate.

A man whom he introduced as "a genuine Jew from Jerusalem" came out from a gloomy recess filled with tusks and sacks of dried red pepper and watched everything from now on with an eye like a gimlet, writing down in a book against each sergeant's name whatever he took to drink. They appeared to have no check on him. Nobody signed anything. Nobody as much as glanced at his account.

"What is the use?" said Schubert, interpreting the unspoken question. "There is just so much drink in the whole place. We shall drink every drop of it! All that matters is who is to pay for the champagne. That stuff is costly."

They all took beer to begin with, knocking the necks from the bottles as if that act alone lent the necessary air of deviltry to the whole proceeding. A small, very black Nyamwesi came with brush and pan and groped on the floor all night for the splinters of glass, sleeping between times in a corner until a fresh volley of breaking bottle necks awoke him to work again.

" *'Die Wacht am Rhein!'* " yelled Schubert. "Start it up! Sing that first!"

He began to sing it himself, all out of tune.

FRED cut the noise short by standing up to play something nobody could sing to—a jangling clamor of chords and runs on which he prides himself. Then he sang a comic song or two in English, we joining in the choruses.

Meanwhile Brown was taking whatever drink came first to hand. He had forgotten his cattle already—the Greeks who stole them—the Masai who stole them from the Greeks. He paid for all he took, to the Jew's extreme surprize and satisfaction, and grumbled at the price of everything, to the Jew's supremest unconcern.

"An' my name's Brown o' Lumbwa, just in proof of all I say!" he informed the room at large at intervals.

When Will had exhausted all the American songs he knew and Fred had run through his own long list, there was nothing left for it but to make up accompaniments to the songs the sergeants had been raised on. Fred made the happy discovery that none of them knew "The Marseillaise"; so he played that as an antidote each time after they had made the hard-wood rafters ring and the smoke-filled air vibrate with Teutonic jingoism.

There was a pause in the proceedings at about ten o'clock.

A native was brought in by two *askaris* and charged before Schubert with hanging about the *boma* gate after dark. The Jew, sitting beside me with his book of names and charges, poured cool water over my bandages and translated to me what they all said. He spoke English very well indeed, but in such low tones that I could scarcely catch the words, drawing in his breath and not moving his lips at all.

The native exclaimed that he had waited to see the *Bwana Makubwa*—the commandant.

He was asked why. To beg a favor. What favor? Satisfaction. For what? For his daughter. He was the father of the girl whom the commandant had favored with attentions. She had been a virgin. Now she was to have a child. It would be a half-black, half-white child. Who would now marry a woman with such a child as that? Yet nothing had been given her. She had been simply sent back home to be a charge on her parents and an already poverty-stricken village. Therefore he had come to ask that justice be done and the girl be given at least a present of money.

The sergeants seemed appalled by the impudence of the request.

"And you dare ask for money from the *Bwana Makubwa?*" Schubert demanded. "Is the honor not sufficient that your black brute of a daughter should have a baby by such a great person? You cattle have no sense of honor! You must learn! Put him down! Beat him till I say stop!"

There was no need to put him down, however. The motion of the hand, voice inflection and order were all too well understood. The man lay face downward on the floor and buried his face in both hands. The *askaris* promptly stripped him of the thin cotton loin-cloth that constituted his only garment, tearing it in pieces as they dragged it from him.

"Go on!" ordered Schubert. "Beat him!"

Both the *askaris* had a *kiboko*. The longest of the two was split at the nether end into four fingers. The shortest was more than a yard long, tapering from an inch and a half where the man's fist gripped it to half an inch thick at the tip. They stood one each side of their victim and brought the whips down on his naked skin alternately.

"Slowly!" ordered Schubert. "The brute doesn't feel it when you beat so fast. So—so is better!"

Not every blow drew blood, for a native's skin is thick and tough, especially where he sits. But the blows that fell on the back and thighs all cut the skin, and within two minutes there was blood running on the floor and splashes of blood on the white-washed wall, cast by the whips as they ascended.

I made up my mind the man was going to be killed, for Schubert gave no order, and the *askaris* did not dare stop without one. The victim writhed but did not cry out, and the writhing grew less. Even Brown sobered up for a time at the sight of it. He came and sat between me and the Jew.

"It's a shame!" he grumbled. "Up in our country twenty-five lashes is the masshimum, an' only to be laid on in the presence of a massishtrate. You beat a black man, an' they'll fine you first offense, jail you second offense, an' third offense God knows what they'll do! Poor ole Brown o' Lumbwa! They fined me once a'ready. Nessht time they'll put me in jail. Better get quite drunk an' be blowed to it!"

He staggered back to his chair by the further wall, leering at Schubert as he passed.

"You're no gentleman!" he asserted aggressively.

Schubert gave the order to stop at last. The *askaris* stood aside, panting from the effort.

"Get up!" ordered Schubert.

The miserable Nyamwesi struggled to his feet and stood limply before Schubert, his face drawn with torture.

"If you don't salute, I'll order you thrashed again!"

The native saluted in a sort of imitation of the German military manner.

"Say 'thank you'!"

"Thank you!"

"*Rrruksa*[*]!"

The poor wretch turned and went, staggering rather than walking to the door and disappearing into outer darkness without a backward glance.

"Now for some more songs and a round of drinks!" Schubert shouted.

But Fred was no longer in mood to make music or even to be civil. He shut the concertina up and asked the Jew how much he owed. The sergeants went on singing without music, and, while we waited for the Jew to reckon up Fred's score, Schubert came over to us and proceeded to deal with the new situation in proper German military manner—by direct assault.

"Always you English criticize!" he began. "I tell you, we Germans know how to rule these black people! We employ no sickly sentiment! They obey or else suffer terribly and swiftly!"

"Are you well loved by the people?" Fred asked him.

"Bah! *Sie wollen wohl beliebt werden?* (You want to be popular, don't you?) Not I! Not we! Their fear is what we cultivate! We successfully make them work our will. But why should I trouble to explain? In a few years there will only be one Government of Africa—and that German! You English are mawkishly sentimental. You think of the feelings of a black man and of the rights of his women!

"Bah! I tell you they have no feelings a real man need consider. And their women have no rights! You know, I suppose, that it is the policy of the German Government to encourage the spread of Mohammedanism in Africa? Well, under the Mohammedan law as given in the Koran, women have no souls. That is as it should be. No women have souls!"

"How about your own mother?" Fred suggested.

"She was a good Prussian. She was superwoman. Not to be mentioned in the same breath with women of any other race! Yet even she—the good Prussian mother—could not hold a candle to a man. Her business was to raise sons for Prussia, and she did it. I have eight brothers, all in the army, and only one sister; she has four sons already."

"Strange that your nation should breed like that!" said Fred.

"NOT strange at all!" answered Schubert. "We are needed to conquer the world! Think, for instance, when we have conquered the Congo Free State and taken away East and South Africa from England—to say nothing of Egypt and India—how many Prussian sergeant-majors we shall want! *Donnerwetter!* Do you think we Germans will long be satisfied with this miserable section of East Africa that was all the English left to us on this coast?

"We use this for a foothold, that is all. We use this to gain time and get ready. You think, perhaps, I do not know, eh? I am only *Feldwebel*—non-commissioned officer, you call it. Well and good. I tell you our officers talk all the time of nothing else. And they don't care who hears them!"

The Jew gave Fred his bill. Schubert snatched it away.

"*Kreutzblitzen!* You are my guests. I invited you."

"Thanks," Fred answered, "but we don't care to be your guests. Here," he said, turning to the Jew. "Take your money!"

Schubert made a contemptuous gesture with his thumb toward Brown, who had fallen dead drunk on the floor.

"You men are in trouble—worse trouble than you guess!"

"I don't believe it," Fred answered. "We have done nothing to merit trouble."

"Merit in this world is another name for chance," said Schubert.

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[*] *Ruksa—you have leave to go.*

"What are we supposed to have done?" demanded Fred.

Schubert at once assumed what was intended to be a sly look of uncommunicable knowledge.

"None of my business to tell what my officers know," he answered.

"The point is—trouble can be forestalled."

"Aw—show your hand!" cut in Will, leaning in front of Fred. "I've seen you Heinies fishing for graft too often in the States not to recognize symptoms! Spill the bait can! There's no other way to tell if we'll bite. Tell us what you're driving at!"

"Ivory!" said Schubert savagely and simply, shutting his jaws after the word with a snap like a steel spring.

It would have broken the teeth of an ordinary human.

"What ivory?"

We all did our best to look blank.

"Tippoo Tib's ivory! You have been watched. You are known to be in search of the stuff."

"The deuce you say!" Fred murmured, with a glance to left and right at us.

"If you were to go to the office tomorrow and tell our commandant what you know," said Schubert, "you might be suitably compensated."

"Who told you to promise us that?" Fred demanded.

The *Feldwebel* did not answer. The sergeants were all singing, smoking and drinking. The Jew was back at his old post, watching every one with gimlet eyes.

"Think it over!" he said presently. "There is time until morning. There is time until you leave this building. After that——"

He shrugged his square shoulders brutally.

"Why not admit that we know what we don't know—and put 'em on a wrong scent?" Will whispered.

"I wish to God Monty were here," groaned Fred.

"Rot!" Will answered. "Monty is all you ever said of him and then some, but we're able to handle this ourselves all right without him. Tell 'em a bull yarn, I say."

Fred relapsed into a sort of black gloom intended to attract the muse of strategy.

"Offer to lead them to it on certain conditions," urged Will. "Think up controversial proposals. Play for time."

Fred shook his head.

"If the stuff should really be in German East," Will argued, "we've no chance in the world of getting even a broker's share of it, Monty or no Monty. Take my advice and tell 'em what they want to know."

Meanwhile an argument of another kind had started across the room. Schubert had related with grim amusement to Sergeant Sachse, who was sitting next him at the time, our disapproval of the flogging.

"At what were they shocked?" wondered Sachse. "At the flogging or the intercourse or because he sent the female packing when she proposed to have a child? Do they not know that to have children about the premises would be subversive of military discipline?"

"They were shocked at all three things," grinned Schubert, "but chiefly, I think, at the flogging."

"Bah! Such a tickling of a native's hide doesn't hurt him to speak of."

IT WAS that that raised the clamor. They were all already frankly drunk, and any excuse for dispute was a good one. One and all, including Schubert, denied Sachse's contention that a flogging did not hurt enough to matter.

"I bet I could take one without winking!" Sachse announced.

Schubert's little bright pig-eyes gleamed through the smoke at that.

"*Kurtz und gut!*" he laughed. "I bet you that case of champagne that you lie!"

There was a united yelp of delight. The sergeants rose and gathered round Sachse. Schubert cursed them and drove them to the chairs again.

"Open that case of champagne!" he roared, and the Jew obeyed, setting the bottles on the table in two rows.

"I bet you those twelve bottles!"

"I can stand as much as you!" hedged Sachse.

"Good! Stroke for stroke! Whoever squeals first shall pay for the champagne!"

Sachse could not back out. His cheeks grew whiter, but he staggered to his feet, swearing like a pirate.

"It is not only Prussians who are men of metal," he boasted. "How shall it be arranged?"

The arrangement was easy. The corporal who was doing police duty outside had a *kiboko* in his hand almost a yard and a half long, and Schubert called him in and examined it with approval.

"How would you like to flog white men?" he demanded.

"I would not dare!" grinned the corporal.

"Not dare, eh? Would you not obey an order?"

"Always I obey!" the man answered, saluting.

"Good! I shall lie here. This other *bwana* shall lie there beside me. You shall stand between. First you shall strike one, then the other—turn and turn about until I give the order to cease! And listen! If you fail to flog with all your might, you shall have two hundred lashes yourself—and they shall be good ones, because I will lay them on! Is it understood?"

"Yes," said the corporal, the whites of his eyes betraying doubt, fear and wonder.

But he grinned with his lips, lest the *Feldwebel* should suspect him of unwillingness.

"Are the terms understood?" demanded Schubert, and the sergeants yelped in the affirmative.

Schubert lay down on the floor, and Sachse beside him about four feet away. The corporal took his stand between. He was an enormous Nubian, broad of chest, with big, sloping shoulder muscles.

"*Nun—recht feste schlagen!*" (Now—hit good and hard!) ordered Schubert.

Then he took the sleeve of his tunic between his teeth and hid his face.

"One!" said one of the sergeants, self-constituted referee.

Down came the heavy black whip with a crack like a gun going off. Schubert neither winced nor murmured, but the blood welled into the seat of his pants and spread like red ink on blotting-paper.

"One!" said the referee again.

The corporal faced about and raised his weapon, standing on tiptoe to get more swing. Sachse flinched at the sound of the whip going up, and the other sergeants roared delight. But he was still when it descended, and the crack of the blow drew neither murmur nor movement from him, either. Like the *Feldwebel*, he had his sleeve between his teeth.

"Two!" said the referee, and the black whip rose again.

It descended with a crack and a splash on the very spot whence the blood flowed, this time cutting the pants open; but Schubert took no more notice of it than if a fly had settled on him. There was a chorus of applause.

"Two!" said the referee.

Again the corporal faced about and balanced himself on tiptoe. Sachse flinched again while waiting for the blow but met it when it did come without a tremor. Blood flowed from him more freely, but his pants seemed to be of sterner stuff, for they did not split until the eight-and-twentieth lash, or thereabouts.

From first to last, although the raw flesh lay open to the lash and the corporal, urged to it by the united threats and praise of all the other sergeants, wrought his utmost, Schubert lay like a man asleep. He might have been dead, except for the even rise and fall of his breathing that never checked or quickened once. Nine-and-forty strokes he took without a sign of yielding. At the eight-and-fortieth Sachse moaned a little, and the referee gave the match against him.

Schubert rose to his feet unaided, grinning, red in the face but without any tortured look.

"Now you can say forever that you have flogged two white men!" he told the *askari*.

"Who will believe me?" the man answered.

Sachse had to be helped to his feet. He was pale and demanded brandy.

"What did I tell you?" laughed Schubert. "A Prussian is better than any man! Look at him and then at me!"

A smug-faced little rascal, obviously in love with the glory reflected on the sergeant-major's servant, produced a basin and sponged his master's raw posterior before us all. Then he was sent for clean white pants, and presently Schubert, only refusing to sit down, was quite himself again.

Sachse on the other hand refused the ministrations of the boy—refused to drink any of the sweet champagne he would have to pay for—and went away murmuring about the madness that takes hold of men in Africa.

Meanwhile, while Schubert strutted and swaggered, making jokes more raw and beastly than his own flogged rump, the Jew came and poured more cool water on my hot bandages, touching them with deft fingers that looked like the hairy legs of a huge spider.

"You should not tell zat —— *Feldwebel* nozink!" he advised in nasal English. "He only obey hees officers. Hees faforite spectacle iss ze blood of innocense!"

He resumed business with his account-book, and I whispered to Fred and Will what advice he had given. Seeing us with our heads together, Schubert crossed the room.

"What have you decided?" he asked, standing before us with his legs apart and his hands behind him in his favorite attitude—swaying gently back and forward because of the drink.

"Nothing," Fred answered. "We'll think it over."

"Too late in the morning! I can do nothing for you in the morning."

"What can you do tonight?" Fred asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I can report. The report will go in at dawn."

"You may tell your superiors," Fred answered, rising, "that, if they care to make us a reasonable offer, I don't say we won't do business!"

Schubert leered.

"Tomorrow will be too late!"

It was Fred's turn to shrug shoulders, and he did it inimitably, turning his back on Schubert and helping Will support me to the door. The *Feldwebel* stood grinning while I held to the door post and they dragged Brown to his feet.

Brown was as dead to the world as a piece of wood. Will hoisted him up on his back and carried him, he snoring all the way home to camp. Fred hoisted and carried me, for the pain of my wound when I tried to walk was unbearable.

WE REACHED camp abreast and were challenged by the sentries, who made a great show of standing guard. They accepted Fred's offer of silver money—and departed, marching up-street in their heavy, iron-bound military boots with the swing and swagger only the Nubian in all the world knows just how to get away with.

I lay on the bed in Fred's tent, and then Kazimoto came to us, hugely troubled about something, stirring the embers of the fire before the tent and arranging the lantern so that its rays would betray any eavesdropper.

"Those *askaris* were not put here to guard our tents," he told us. "As soon as you were gone, the Greeks and the Goa came. They and the *askaris* questioned me. It was a trick! You were drawn away on purpose! One by one they questioned us all, but particularly me."

"What about?" Fred demanded.

"Why are we here? What will we do? What do we know? What do I know about you? Why do I serve you? To what place will we travel next—and when? How much money have we with us? Have we friends or acquaintances in Muanza? Do you, *Bwana*, carry any letters in your pockets? Of what do you speak when you suppose no man is listening? *Bwana*, my heart is very sad in me! Those Greeks tell lies, and the Germans stir trouble in a big pot like the witches!

"I know the Germans! I am Nyamwezi. I was born not far from here and ran away as soon as I was old enough because the Germans shot my father and let my mother and brothers starve to death. I did not starve, because one of them took me for a servant; but I ran away from him. My heart is very sad to be in this place. They ask what of a hoard of ivory. I tell them I do not know, and they threaten to beat me. This place is bad. Let us go away tonight."

There was no sleep that night for any of us. My wound hurt too much. The others were too worried. By the light of the lantern in Fred's tent we cooked up a story to tell that we hoped would induce the Germans to let us wander where we chose.

"Sure they'll watch us!" Will admitted. "But as our only real reason for coming down here—leaving Brown's cattle out of the reckoning—was to throw people off the scent, in what way are we worse off? Let 'em keep on thinking we know where Tippoo hid the stuff. Let's send a telegram in code to Monty."

"They may refuse to take a telegram in code," Fred said. "We can try the code, of course. They'll probably put their experts on deciphering the message. They'll say it was lost if there are any inquiries afterward. I propose we send a straight-out cablegram advising Monty of our whereabouts—they'll let that go through—and warning him to ask for letters at the bank in Mombasa before he does anything else."

"Yes, but—" Will objected.

"Wait!" said Fred. "I haven't finished. Then write two letters: one full of any old nonsense, to be sent in the regular way by mail. They'll open that. The other to go by runner. Kazimoto can find us a runner. He knows these Nyamwezi. He can pick a man who'll get through without fail."

We could think of nothing to say against the plan. The argument that the German Government would scarcely stoop to open private mail did not seem to hold water when we examined it; so we wrote as Fred suggested—one letter telling Monty that we hoped to make some arrangement with the Germans and, at all events, to wait in German East until he could join us—and the other telling him the real facts at great length, laboriously set out in the code we had agreed on.

We sealed the second letter in several wrappers and sewed it up finally in a piece of water-proof silk. Then we sent for Kazimoto and ordered him to find the sort of messenger we needed.

"Send me," he urged. "I will start now, before it is light. I will hide by day and travel by night until I reach the British border. Give me only enough cooked food and my pay, and I will take the letter without fail."

We refused, for he was too useful to us. He begged again and again to be sent with the letter, promising faithfully to wait for us afterward on the British side of the border at any place we should name. But we upbraided him for cowardice, ordered him to find another messenger and promised him he need have no fear of Germans as long as he remained our servant.

Before high noon we would each have given many years of Kazimoto's pay if only we could have recalled that decision and have known that he was speeding away from Muanza toward a border where white men knew the use of mercy.

Just as the first peep of dawn began to color the sky, Schubert came swaggering down-street to us, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"How have you slept?" he asked us, laughing.

We answered something or other.

"I did not trouble to sleep! I stayed and finished the drinks. I have just swallowed the last of the beer! Whoever wants a morning drink must wait for it now until the overland *safari* comes!"

We displayed no interest. Brown—the only one likely to yearn for alcohol before breakfast—still snored in his tent.

"What of it now? I go to drill my troops. Parade is at six sharp. There remains twenty minutes. Come with me and tell your secret at the *boma* now before it is too late!"

"Explain why it would be too late after breakfast?" demanded Fred.

"All right," said Schubert. "I will tell you this much. There will come a launch this morning from Kisumu in British East. There will be people on that launch, one of whom has authority that overrides that of the commandant of this place. The commandant of this place desires to know your information—and get the credit for it—before that individual, whose authority is higher, comes. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," Fred answered.

"See if this is clear, too!" cut in Will. "You go and ask your commandant what price he offers for the secret. Nothing for nothing. Tell him we're not afraid of him!"

"It is none of my business to tell him anything," said Schubert, spitting and turning on his heel.

He swaggered out of the camping-ground and up-street again, leaving the clear impression behind him that he washed his hands of us for good and all.

"Let's watch him drill his men," said I. "I'll wait on the hospital steps until they open the place."

So we ate a scratch breakfast, and Fred and Will helped me up-street, past where the Jew stood blinking in the morning sun on the steps of the D. O. A. G. He seemed to be saying prayers but beckoned to us.

"Trouble," he said. "Trouble. If you have frien's, fetch them—send for them!"

"Can you send a letter for us to British East?" Fred asked him.

"God forbid!"

He turned his back on us and ran in.

* * *

SCHUBERT was standing in mid-square with a hundred *askaris* lined up two-deep in front of him. There were no other Germans on parade. The corporals were Nubians, and the rest of the rank and file either Nubian or some sort of Sudanese. He was haranguing them in a bastard mixture of Kiswahili, Arabic and German, they standing rigidly at attention, their rifles at the present.

Not content with the effect of his words, he strode up presently to a front-rank man and hit him in the face with clenched fist. In the effort to recover his balance, the man let his rifle get out of alinement. Schubert wrenched it from him. It fell to the ground.

He struck the man and, when he stooped to pick the rifle up, kicked him in the face. Then he strode down the line and beat two other men for grinning. All this a lieutenant by the *boma* gate watched without a sign of disapproval or even much interest.

Meanwhile the chain-gang emerged from the *boma* gate, going full-pelt, fastened neck to neck, the chain taut and each man carrying a water-jar. The minute they had crossed the square, Schubert commenced with company drill, and for two hours after that, with but one interval of less than five minutes for rest, he kept them pounding the gravel in evolution after evolution—manual exercise at the double—skirmishing exercise—setting-up drill—goose-step and all the mechanical, merciless precision drill with which the Germans make machines of men.

His debauch did not seem in the least to have affected him, unless to make his temper more violently critical. By seven o'clock the sun was dazzling his eyes from over the *boma* wall. The dust rose off the square. The words of command came bellowing in swift succession from a throat that ought to have been hard put to it to whisper. If anything, he grew more active and exacting as the *askaris* wearied, and, by the time the two hours were up, they were ready to a man to drop.

But not so he. He dismissed them and swaggered over to the market-place to hector and bully the natives who were piling their wares in the shade of the great grass roof. Then he went into the *boma* to breakfast just as a sergeant in khaki came over and unlocked the hospital door. I followed the sergeant in, but he ordered me out again.

"I have come to see the doctor," I said. "I need attention."

"It will be for the doctor to say what you need when he has seen you!" he answered.

By and by the doctor came and passed me sitting on the steps. He took no notice of me but sent out the sergeant to inquire why I had not stood up as he passed. I did not answer, and the sergeant went in again.

Fred by that time was simply blasphemous, alternately threatening to go in and kick the doctor and condemning Will's determination to do the same thing. Finally we decided to see the matter through patiently, and we all sat together on the steps watching the activity of the square. There was a lot going on—bartering of skins and hides—counting of crocodile eggs, brought in by natives for sake of the bounty of a few copper coins the hundred—a cock-fight in one corner—the carrying to and fro of bunches of bananas, meat and grain in baskets. And in and out among it all, full-pelt in the hot sun, marched the chain-gang, doing the township dirty work.

By and by Schubert emerged from the *boma* gate, followed by natives carrying a table and a soap box. He set these under a limb of the great baobab that faced the *boma* gate not far from the middle of the square. I noticed then for the first time that a short hempen rope hung suspended from the largest branch, with a noose in the end. The noose was not more than two feet below the branch.

Schubert's consideration of the table's exact position and the placing of the soap box on the table was interrupted by a new arrival. Coutlass, his Greek companion and the Goanese arrived arm-in-arm, followed closely by two *askaris* who shouted angrily and made a great show of trying to prevent them. One of the *askaris* aimed his rifle absurdly at Coutlass, both Greeks and the Goanese daring him gleefully to pull the trigger.

"There is going to be a hanging!" Coutlass shouted to us. "They thought we would remain quietly in camp with that going on. Give us chairs!" he called to Schubert.

Schubert conferred with an officer and gave the Greeks leave to stand under the tree. Later yet Brown came along and joined us on the steps, looking red-eyed and ridiculous.

"Goin' to be a hangin'," he announced. "I been askin' natives about it. Black man stole the condemned man's daughter an' refused to pay cows for her accordin' to custom or anythin'—said he could do what the white men did'n' help himself. Father of the girl took a spear an' settled the thief's hash with it—ran him through—did a clean job. Serve him right—eh—what? Germans went an' nabbed him, though—tried him in open court—goin' to hang him this mornin' for murder.

"Up in British East we don't hang black men for murder unless it's what they call an aggravated case—murder an' robbery—murder an' arson—murder an' rape. Hang a white man for murderin' a black, sure as you're sitting here, an' shoot a black man for murderin' a white. But the blacks don't understand; so, when they kill one another in such a case as this, why, we give 'em a short jail sentence an' a good long lecture an' let 'em go again. These folks have it t'other way round. They never hang a German, whether he's guilty or not, but string up a black man, what doesn't understand, for half o' nothin'!"

A great crowd began gathering about the tree and was presently driven by *askaris* with whips into a mass on the far side of the tree from us. Whether purposely or not, they left a clear view from the hospital steps of all that should happen. Evidently warning had been sent out broadcast, for the inhabitants of village after village came trooping into town to watch, each lot led by its *sultani* in filthy rags and wearing the foolish imitation crown his conquerors had supplied him at several times its proper price. The square was a dense sea of people before nine o'clock, and the *askaris* made the front few hundreds lie and the next rows squat, in order that the men and women behind might see.

Then at last out came the victim with his hands tied behind him and a bright-red blanket on his loins. He was a proud-looking fellow. He halted a moment between his guard of German sergeants and eyed the crowd and us and the tree and the noose.

Then he looked down on the ground and appeared to take no further interest.

The sergeants took him by the arms and led him along to the table between them. Out came the commandant then, in snow-white uniform, followed by a guard of honor consisting of lieutenant, two sergeants and six black *askaris*.

There was a chair by the table. At sight of the commandant, the sergeants made their victim use that as a step by which to mount the table and soap-box, and there he stood, eying his oppressors as calmly as if he were witnessing a play. A murmur arose among the crowd. A number of natives called to him by name, but he took no notice after that one first, steady gaze.

"They're sayin' good-by to him," said Brown, breathing in my ear. "They're telling him they won't forget him!"

The crack of *askaris'* whips falling on heads and naked shoulders swiftly reduced the crowd to silence. Then the commandant faced the mall and made a speech with that ash-can voice of his—first in German—then in the Nyamwezi tongue. Will translated to us sentence by sentence, the doctor standing on the top step behind us, smiling approval. He seemed to think we would be benefited by the lecture just as much as the natives.

IT WAS awful humbug that the commandant reeled off to his silent audience—hypocrisy garbed in paternal phrases and interlarded with buncombe about Germany's mission to bring happiness to subject peoples.

"Above all," he repeated again and again, "the law must be enforced impartially—the good, sound, German law that knows no fear or favor but governs all alike!"

When he had finished, he turned to the culprit.

"Now," he demanded, "do you know why you are to be hanged?"

There was a moment's utter silence. The man on the table with his hands behind him surveyed the crowd again with a gaze of simple dignity, looked down on the commandant and raised an unexpectedly high, almost falsetto note, that in the silence carried all across the square.

"I am to die," he said, "because I did right! My enemy did what German officers do. He stole my young girl. I killed him as I hope all you Germans may be killed. But hope no longer gathers fruit in this land!"

"Ah-h-h-h!" the crowd sighed in unison.

"Good man!" exploded Fred, and the doctor tried to kick him from behind—not hard, but enough to call his attention to the proprieties. His toe struck me instead, and, when I looked up angrily, he tried to pretend he was not aware of what he had done.

Under the tree the commandant flew into a rage such as I have seldom seen. Each land has a temper of its own, and the white man's anger varies in inverse ratio with his nearness to the equator. But *furor teutonicus* transplanted is the least controllable, least dignified, least admirable that there is. And that man's passion was the apex of its kind.

His beard spread as a peacock spreads its tail. His eyes blazed. His eyebrows disappeared under the brim of his white helmet, and his clenched fists burst the white cotton gloves. He half drew his saber—thought better of that and returned it. There was an *askari* standing near with *kiboko* in hand to drive back the crowd should any press too closely. He snatched the whip and struck the condemned man with it as high up as he could reach, making a great welt across his bare stomach. The man neither winced nor complained.

"For those words," he screamed in German, "you shall not die in comfort! For that insolence mere hanging is too good!"

Then he calmed himself a little and repeated the words in the native tongue, explaining to the crowd that German dignity should be upheld at all costs.

"Fetch him down from there!" he ordered.

Schubert sprang on the table and knocked the condemned man off it with a blow of his fist. With hands bound behind him, the poor fellow had no power of balance, and, though he jumped clear, he fell face downward, skinning his cheek on the gravel. The commandant promptly put a foot on his neck and pinned him down.

"Flog him!" he ordered. "Two hundred lashes!"

It was done in silence, except for the corporal's labored breathing and the commandant's incessant sharp commands to beat harder—harder—harder. A sergeant stood by, counting. The crack of the whip divided up the silence into periods of agony.

When the count was done, the victim was still conscious. Schubert and a sergeant dragged him to his feet and hauled him to the table. Four other men—two sergeants and two natives—passed a rope round the table legs. Schubert lifted the victim by the elbows so that his head could pass through the noose, and, when that was accomplished, the man had to stand on tiptoe on the soap box in order to breathe at all.

"All ready!" announced Schubert and jumped off with a laugh, his white tunic bloody from contact with the victim's tortured back.

"*Los!*" roared the commandant.

The men hauled on the rope. Table and soap box came tumbling away, and the victim spun in the air on nothing, spinning round and round and round—slower and slower and slower—then back the other way round faster and faster.

They say hanging is a merciful death—that the pressure of rope on two arteries produces anesthesia, but few are reported to have come back to tell of the experience. At any rate, as is not the case with shooting, it is easy to know when the victim is really dead.

For seconds that seemed minutes—for minutes that seemed hours, the poor wretch spun, his elbows out, his knees up, his tongue out, his face wrinkled into tortured shapes and his toes pointed upward so sharply that they almost touched his shins. Then suddenly the toes turned downward, and the knees relapsed. The corpse hung limp, and the crowd sighed miserably, to the last man, woman and child, turning its back on what to them must have symbolized German rule.

They left the corpse hanging there. It was to be there until evening, some one said, for an example to frequenters of the market-place. The crowd trailed away, none glancing back. The pattering of feet ceased. The market-place across the square resumed its hum and activity. Then a native orderly came down the steps and touched me on the elbow. I struggled to my feet and limped after him up the steps.

Practically at the mercy of the doctor, I made up my mind to be civil to him whether that suited me or not. I rather expected he would come to meet me, perhaps help me to a chair, and I wondered how, in my ignorance of German, I should contrive to answer his questions.

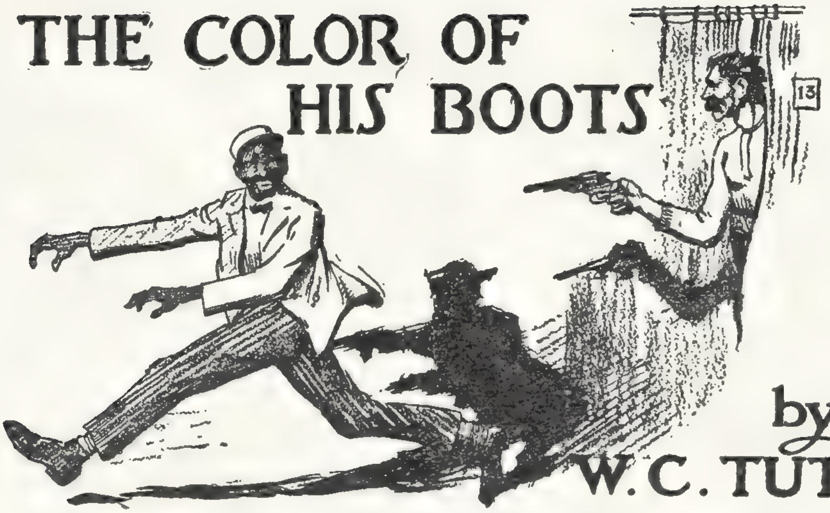
But I needed not have worried. I did not even see him. He had left by the back door, and the orderly washed the wound and changed my bandages. That was all. There was no charge for the bandages, and the orderly was gentle—now that his master's back was turned.

"Didn't he leave word when he would see me?" I asked.

"*Nabanah!*" he answered—meaning "he did not—there is not—there is nothing doing!"

TO BE CONTINUED

THE COLOR OF HIS BOOTS



by W.C. TUTTLE

Author of "Jay Bird's Judgment," "Dirty Work for Doughgod," etc.

I STILL contend that Magpie Simpkins is too finicky. It's all right for a feller to desire to appear to a good advantage, especially on Sunday, but a finicky person hadn't ought to pack a gun at a time when he's just acquired something out of the ordinary in haberdashery.

New boots don't mean nothing but misery to me. They could set diamonds all the way around the sole, but just the same she don't spell nothing but blisters and cramps to Ike Harper. Anyway, I'm so bow-legged that my heels have got to be run over on the outside edges before I can be comfortable around the knees.

Magpie paid twenty dollars for them yaller boots. They was glowing with youth, vitality and shiny polish when Magpie leaned 'em against the side of that Pullman berth. They was a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

A pair of boots ain't nothing but footwear, except when they're the color of a sunset in Injun Summer and fit like the skin on a sausage—and cost twenty dollars.

Some folks will likely argue that Magpie hadn't owned said boots long enough to become attached to 'em, but to those critics I will say: you don't have to have a twenty-dollar bill around the house very long before you becomes sentimental about it.

Me and Magpie are on our way back from the Stampede at Totem, where we went to clean up some money, figuring that we knowed a little more than the fellers did who run the games. We found out that honesty is a poor poker policy in Totem.

Magpie sheds bitter tears over them boots. Their pristine yaller has went. A porter, suffering from color-blindness, lack of illumination, or gin, has rubbed 'em plentiful with black polish until there ain't nothing identifying left except the shape and size.

Magpie also bought a new blanket from an Injun robe vender. It contains all the colors of the rainbow, and the design is supposed to invoke a special blessing from some high-cheeked god of some kind.

Magpie looks at said boots, folds 'em reverently in the blanket and then pushes the bell in the berth. Them boots has been under that seat ever since we got up in the morning. Magpie, being a heap vain, desires to pack 'em openly and places same in the aisle at night, along with his regular ones. Now that he wishes to show off a little, he opines to put 'em on. He sets there in his socks and pushes that little button.

As I said before, Magpie is too finicky and sudden. No matter if he did know the certain porter connected with our car and didn't wait for an apology—he might 'a' sounded a warning.

He didn't hit the porter, but he would as soon as he got used to the sway of that car, 'cause his third shot busted the glass right by the porter's head.

Maybe the conductor was right, and maybe he wasn't. Anyway, it's danged bad form to hop on to a man's back when he's trying to settle a personal matter. Him and Magpie went down in the aisle, and everybody begins to exercise their lungs.

Being part and parcel of Magpie's crew, I immediate and soon bends my gun over the conductor's head. Folks will likely say that I was wrong, that I had no interest in them yaller boots; but there's bound to be some Sundays when Magpie won't wear 'em, and there ain't no law against me dressing up a little.

What is politely known as consternation seems to prevail. Some folks even go so far as to try and hand us their valuables, while others seem to have the instinct of prairie-dogs and hunt a hole.

Then the train jerks to a stop, which almost upsets me, and Magpie backs into me, poking shells into his gun.

"Grab my bundle and get a-going," he yelps, and I obeyed him to the letter.

Then we backs off that train. A brakeman heaves a hunk of coal at us and ducks under the train, and from up by the express car comes the roar of a shotgun, and a handful of buckshot seeps around us. We gets our bearings, and the way we went away from that train would make an antelope weep with envy. Then we sees the train pull out.

"My ——!" grunts Magpie. "We sure got some action, Ike!"

"*Wa-a-a-a! Wa-a-a-a!*"

"What in —— was that?" whispers Magpie.

"I'd say," says I, feeling a drop of cold sweat run right down my back-bone, "I'd say that your boots squeaked, Magpie."

"Boots? I ain't got none on, Ike. Did you get that bundle?"

I sure did. It sort of wiggled in my hands; so I laid it down on the ground.

"*Wa-a-a-a! Yah-a-a-a-a!*" she goes again.

Magpie rolled the bundle over with the muzzle of his gun, and then we stares at each other. Magpie pulls his long mustache and clears his throat.

"Ike," says he solemn-like, "you picked the wrong bundle. Beyond the shadder of a doubt you've traded my boots for a baby."

The sinful thing I had done weighed upon my soul, and I felt bad. I pictured the agonized mother setting there in that car, squeaking like a Red River cart when feeding time comes and she tries to nurse a pair of stained boots. Maybe she'd recognize good leather and workmanship, but at a time like that you can't expect a mother to pay much attention to tanning and stitching on a pair of high-heeled boots—even if they did cost twenty dollars.

"Great gosh!" says I after due consideration. "This is awful!"

"It sure is," agrees Magpie. "I'll get my feet full of cactus."

"Dang your feet! Think of what we've done!"

"Yeah? What you've done, Ike. Don't embroil me in it. Them boots cost me regular money."

"Well," says I after a while, "we're a pair of —— fools!"

"Don't talk shop, Ike," he advises me weary-like, peering off into the gloom. "If you've got any sympathy, use a little on me. I might step on a rattlesnake."

"If I knowed where one lived, I'd lead you to it," I replies. "Shooting up a train is enough scandal for a pair of peace lovers from Piperock—without also getting arrested for kidnaping. If anybody ever says yaller boots to me again, they'd better pick a soft spot to land on, 'cause they're sure going deep."

"Pshaw! I hate it as much as you do, Ike. Figuring from a property standpoint, I'm a lot worse off than you are. In fact, you're two boots and a baby better off than I am."

We set there and peers off into the gloom. Here we are, dumped off in the middle of the Bad Lands, night time, with no friendly beacon to guide us: one sockless, one brainless, and a baby—and all because Magpie prefers his boots yaller instead of black.

"Well," says Magpie, "I reckon we might as well mosey along, Ike. Come on, family man."

I picks up that squawking bundle of humanity, hitches up my belt and follers Magpie over to the track, where we points north. I reckon we got dumped off in a country where there never was no cause to build a town.

THEN that offspring begins to raise its voice in protest. Sounded to me like Andy Johnson trying to play sentimental music on a squeeze organ when he's full to the neck with hooch. I pikes along behind Magpie, trying to keep my mind off that suffering bunch of misery. But it ain't no use.

"What do you reckon has got into the critter?" I asks, and Magpie stops.

"A feller what don't know any more about babies than you do, Ike, sure is liable to mistake one for a pair of boots," says he sarcastic-like. "The thing is hungry. My gosh! What are you doing—carrying it upside down? Give it to me! Feller like you hadn't ought to never pack a kid. Poor little jasper is hungry as——!"

"Likely starved to death," I agrees. "But that ain't no reason for you to use that kind of language before you finds out the sex. It's as much my baby as yours, Magpie, and I ain't going to raise no female child to swear like a mule-skinner. *Sabe?* What's it hungry for?"

"Hungry for?"

Magpie stubs his toe and almost drops the baby.

"Gosh dang the blasted luck!" he yelps, "Tore a toe plumb off!"

"Hungry for what?" I asks again.

"Ike." Magpie stops limping and turns to me. "Ike, you ignorant imbecile, what do you reckon it's hungry for? Figure it's yelping for ham and eggs?"

"Sensible yelp if it is," says I. "What do babies hunger for, Magpie?"

"M'yah!" grunts Magpie, which goes to show that he's an expert on baby fodder.

We pilgrims along for a while, and all to once I remembers something I read on a label once. Said it was fine for babies.

"Condensed milk!" I snorts out loud.

Magpie stops.

"Just struck you, did it?" he says wise-like. "Took you a long time. Yessir, you guessed it, Ike. We'll give it a can of condensed milk."

"All right," says I. "Give it a can, Magpie. If canned milk will stop that racket, give it one for me. The twelve o'clock whistle has blowed for that kid an hour ago."

"Ike, you're a —— fool!"

"Now who's talking shop?" I asks sweet-like.

On we goes, Magpie limping and swearing every time he kicks a tie, and the world getting darker and darker every step we take.

Babies ain't got much sense, I reckon. Mostly any person or animal that creeps, crawls or walks will pine for a thing for a certain length of time, and, when it don't show in a reasonable period of pining, they forgets it; but a baby gets one idea in its bosom and cherishes said idea forever and ever, amen.

This one is too young for us to explain things to, and the night is too dark for us to hand it anything in sign-language; so we pilgrims along, listening to it wail continuous for something to ease its stummick. Pretty soon Magpie stops.

"Ike," says he severe-like, "you've got to find something to feed to this infant. The blamed thing must be plumb empty, to wail thataway, and I won't poke along and let it die in my arms."

"I've got forty-three dollars, Magpie," says I, "and I hereby gives you power of attorney to take my property to dinner. I'm neither a wet-nurse nor a restaurant."

We pikes along for a while, baby wailing copiously. Then Magpie says—

"Wonder if singing would help it any?"

"Might as well wish for condensed milk," says I.

"I might sing a little," says he apologetic-like.

"Yes," says I. "You might. You never have—not in my hearing, Magpie. Even if your vocal efforts would please the child, it would be a heap nerve racking to me; so I votes in favor of the infant solo."

The baby keeps on playing three notes plumb across the board:

"*Wa-a-a-a! Ma-a-a-a-a! Yah-a-a-a-a!*"

Pretty soon Magpie stops and sets down on the rail.

"Ike, I can't stand this," he wails. "We've got to get condensed milk for this human phonygraft, or it will ruin its lungs."

We sets there in the dark and contemplates deep-like. Off in the distance a coyote raises its voice in protest against the bounty law, and then a cow bawls soft-like.

"My ——!" grunts Magpie prayerful-like. "Cow! Don't they make condensed milk out of cow milk, Ike?"

"Did you think they made it out of cans?" I asks.

"Cow!" he grunted joyful-like, getting to his feet. "We'll milk that critter, Ike."

He picks up our painful inheritance, pilgrims down the railroad fill, and we goes in the direction of that cow's voice. We finds said bawlers standing in the corner of a fence, and they acts inquisitive toward us.

"We ain't got no rope, Magpie," I objects. But he's enthusiastic over the proposition and says:

"Milk cows ain't wild, Ike. All you've got to do is to corner 'em. *Sabe?* You hold this starving infant while Uncle Dudley plays milkmaid."

He crawls over the fence and approaches the herd. I'll admit that Magpie has a soothing voice, and his "So-o-o, boss," would assure most anything of his good intentions. But them cows ain't used to having strangers come out of the night to steal their juice. They sort of mills around and acts foreign to his designs.

"Make that kid shut up!" he yelps. "It's scaring the critters, Ike."

"I ain't no murderer," says I. "There is things that nothing short of sudden death will stop. Hurry up with the nourishment."

I hears a cow bawl, and then comes a rattle, a bump and a curse.

"What are you trying to do?" I asks.

Pretty soon I hears Magpie spit audible-like, and then:

"Dang the luck! Tried to bulldog a muley cow!"

Bulldogging is the gentle pastime of getting in front of a cow, getting one arm under a horn and the other arm over a horn and then twisting the critter's neck until said critter decides to lay down. Muley cows are exempt on account of not having any horns.

The baby seems to sympathize openly with the cows. In fact, that kid has the only perpetual voice I ever heard.

"Hurry up with that milk!" I yelps.

I hears somebody swearing sweet and low; a cow grunts deep-like, and then comes a dull thud.

"*Wa-a-a-a! Ma-a-a-a!*" wails the kid.

"Woof!" I hears Magpie grunt and then, "Come huh-here! Got 'um!"

I lays the baby down on the ground and crawls through the fence. A cow sticks its cold nose in my face in the dark and uses my necktie for a handkerchief.

"Where you got 'um?" I asks, peering around.

"Huh-here, Ike."

I peers closer and finds Magpie down on his shoulders, with a cow's head in his arms. The rest of the animal is making useless jerks, trying to get loose.

"Mum-milk it," he stutters.

"Yes'm," says I. "What in?"

"What in?" he grunts. "In your huh-hat."

"Like ——! In my new Stetson? Not any milk, thanks. Give me your hat, Magpie."

"Lost it. You danged— Sh-h-h-h!"

WHEN we heard footsteps approaching on horseback. Up that line fence comes some indistinct shapes. We hears the creak of saddles, and then somebody curses a loose cinch. They stops right near to us, and we holds the cow and our breaths.

"Can't do much until daylight," opines a voice. "Never catch anything busting around in the dark."

"Ain't you got that cinch fixed yet, Mort?" asks another voice.

"*Wa-a-a-a-a!*"

We hears a couple of broncs move quick. Somebody swears.

"What in —— made that noise?" grunts somebody.

"Rabbit, I reckon," chuckles the feller who is fixing his cinch. "You're a fine posse. Like a nervous bunch of old women. Well, let's go."

They drifts away in the dark, and me and Magpie wipes the perspiration off our brows.

"Thank the Lord for the little rabbits!" grunts Magpie. "Now get busy on the dairy proposition, Ike. I'll buy you a new hat."

I ain't no milkmaid. All my life I've punched cows, prospected, gambled a little and played deputy to Magpie while he was sheriff. I've always put milk in the same class with water—meek and mild. I'm not qualified to pail a cow—not even gentle cows, but under the existing circumstances I tries to do my duty.

The baby raises its voice in discords; so I hurries to get it a grub stake.

Magpie is holding firm; so I takes off my new hat and kneels down on the ground. Then I got up on my feet, walked around to the other end of the critter and told Magpie what I thought of him as a cow-man. We had a hard time letting that critter loose without it doing us bodily harm, and then we crawled back through the fence, and Magpie picked up our audible off-spring.

"Well," says he, "there's one steer that will have something to think about for a while, even if I did lose a sock and some skin. Wonder who the posse was after?"

"Not us," says I, holding my hands over my ears to shut out the wails of misery coming from that bundle. "Where in thunder do we find something to appease that kid's appetite?"

"Gawd only knows," says he solemn-like, limping along in the dark. "If it dies, you're a murderer, Ike. I'm doing all I can to save both of your lives."

Then we saw a light. Over to the left of us comes a flicker from a cabin window. Magpie turns like the needle of a compass and points straight for the flicker.

"Where there's light, there's succor," says Magpie.

"And, where it's dark, there's two," I replies, and we pilgrims along, listening to our accidental inheritance howl itself hoarse.

We seen some folks ride away from the open door before we got there; so we waited until they are gone.

"Shall we go right in and demand a can of milk?" I asks.

"I've got a scheme, Ike," says he wise-like. "I'll go in alone with the baby. *Sabe?* I needs boots as bad as this kid needs food, and maybe I can get both. I'll tell 'em my wife died way back in the timber and that I'm trying to get back to civilization with my child. I'll harp on their heart-strings until they feeds the baby and shoes Magpie. You hang around, Ike. If we both went in, there'd be too much to explain."

"Your scheme sounds good," says I. "Play her plumb across the board. Don't refuse to take a sandwich along if they offers it, 'cause Ike Harper is about to wail for food, too."

Magpie limps up to the door and knocks, while I sets down on the fence and rolls a smoke. The night seems peaceful since the wailing of the infant has ceased, and I feel sort of free-like. Being a father must take a lot of responsibility.

Pretty soon I gets a hankering to see what's going on in there. I sneaks to a side window and peeks in. I can't get much of a view, but I can see this much: Magpie has got his hands above his head and a resigned look in his lean face. In front of him is a mean-looking *hombre* with a shotgun in his hands, and behind him stands a capable-looking female with the meanest face I ever seen.

Then I hears the feller say to the woman:

"You take this gun and keep him setting right there, Violet, and I'll go after the posse. They ain't gone very far."

I leans against the wall and wonders out loud what kind of a place Magpie has got into. Then the door opens, and the feller hops out and beats it for the stable. A minute later I hears him ride away. I hears the female say something to Magpie about him deserving something worse than hanging. I've wished the same thing on Magpie lots of times, but under the circumstances I can't let out the job. It ain't noways safe to bust into that door and get the insides of a shotgun in my mainspring; so I pokes around the cabin for a better way.

"*Wa-a-a-a! Yah-a-a-a-a!*" comes a voice from inside near where I'm fussing with a window.

It sure gives me an idea. Without the evidence—if the kid is evidence—they can't do no more than let Magpie loose. So I slips the window open easy-like and slips over the sill.

It's almighty dark in there, but I can see a thread of light shining through the crack in the door, and I hears the woman say:

"Set still, you villain! You deserve everything you've got coming."

"I bow to superior wisdom, ma'am," says Magpie.

Just then I finds what I seek. It gives a little squeak as I pick it up, but I hugs it to my bosom and starts for the window—and then I stepped on a dog!

Looking back on the episode, I'm of the opinion that the dog must 'a' been deaf, dumb and blind—but not suffering from lockjaw. Maybe it was one of them family heirlooms you'll find now and then laying around in a cabin, soaking up heat and odorizing the atmosphere with every smell that old dog age is heir to. Anyway, this dog still retained its youthful audibility and a certain degree of mastication, 'cause it grabbed me by the leg just above my boot and hung on.

Such a condition made it hard for Ike Harper to show much speed. Here I am with a baby in my arms, a dog half-way up my lap filling the air with choking barks, and me trying to tip myself over far enough to fall out of the window.

I've got my belt line over the sill when the door flies open and a voice yelps—

"Sic' 'em, Nero!"

Nero didn't need any urging. In fact, I don't reckon that Nero ever heard her, 'cause he was doing his little best without any cheers from the weaker sex.

I manages to twist myself over on my back, swing my free leg up high—which gave me added weight on my outside end—and just as I sways toward the earth I feels the hot breath of a shotgun pass over me. Nero let loose. I reckon that Nero died with the taste of the best sourdough on earth on his palate.

The top of my boot got fringed plentiful, and some of the shot cut fancy designs on my knee-cap. But me and the kid landed in a heap, and I'd tell a man that we didn't waste no time going away.

I shoved on some extra speed, which enabled me to clear the fence, and then I runs right into Magpie. We both grunts a greeting and lopes away together. We puts a mile or more between us and that shack and then stops to get our wind.

"Close call!" puffs Magpie. "By cripes! Posse hunting for a kidnaper. Half-witted sheepherder swiped a feller's kid 'cause the woman wouldn't feed him. Man back there knowed him by sight, and he identifies me as being the shepherd. Said he was the same length and had hair on his face."

"Must 'a' been mistaken, Magpie," says I.

"Wish I'd a left the baby there," says he, after a while. "Wish I had, Ike. Reckon they'd 'a' found the owner."

"You wish you had?" I asks. "Did you say 'wish you had?' "

"Uh-huh. Could easy, Ike. When that female heard the noise in the other room, she ignored me; so I grabs the kid and ducked out."

"My ——!" says I. "You got a baby with you, Magpie?"

"*Wa-a-a-a! Ma-a-a-a!*" comes from over by Magpie.

"*Yah-a-a-a-a! Ma-a-a-a-a!*" comes from my arms.

NEITHER one of us has anything to say. In fact there ain't nothing to be said. The insides of me are wondering whether I'm going to cuss or cry. I feel like somebody had pushed me out of a balloon.

Pretty soon Magpie says soft-like:

"Twins! Wasn't one enough, Ike?"

"Too many," I agrees weak-like. "One was too many, Magpie. If Sherman had twins, he'd never knowed there was a war."

Where we'd only had a solo, we've now got a duet. If anything, the last one had a higher voice than the first one and used several more notes. It also seemed to get its second wind long after the first one had stopped to pump air.

We sets there in the dark and listens. A couple of coyotes off on a little butte tries to sing their opening song, but their voices are drowned by the voices of children, and they sneaks away in disgust.

"We've got to take it back," states Magpie sad-like. "It's got to be done, Ike."

"With due caution," I agrees. "That female is a wing-shot, if you asks me, Magpie. Also, that posse might be there. *Sabe?*"

We sets there in the dark as long as we can stand the wailing, and, when our nerves give out, we gets up and looks around.

"Which way lieth the shack?" inquires Magpie. "We've got to take that last kid back home."

I don't know which way we came. It's so dark that I can hardly see Magpie, who is right beside me. From the north comes a feel of storm, and a little rumble from above seems to ask us if we ain't got sense enough to come in out of the rain.

"Standing here ain't going to do nothing for us," states Magpie. "We may point wrong and get nowhere, but our intentions are good."

"Let us hope we strike a dairy," says I, and we plods along again.

The Lord only knows where we went, and He likely didn't pay much attention. We just traveled regardless, follering the lines of least resistance. Magpie has got so he ignores his bare feet. I reckon a feller's feet can get just so full of cactus and stone-bruises that nothing can hurt 'em any more.

We drifted down a dry creek bed just as the rain began to come down on our unprotected heads. Then we went hunting for a tree to get under. All to once Magpie stops, and I bump into him. I hears horses smashing through the brush. Somebody whoops, and a shot is fired. Then the noise drifts off down the gulch.

"Posse," informs Magpie.

"Did you think I'd mistake it for a duck hunt?" I asks.

Them kids act like we wasn't paying enough attention to them; so they starts another kindergarten grand opery.

"Keep your kid still!" hisses Magpie. "Want the posse to find us?"

"Make your own shut up!" I snaps right back at him, and just then we walks right into a wall.

"Shack!" grunts Magpie.

"One wall, at least," I agrees. "Let us foregather within and shun the rain."

We sneaked around to the door, which is not locked, and went in. It's so dark in there that we can't see a thing, and I bumps into a bunk. I deposits my infant on the bunk and goes hunting for something to make a light.

"Matches all wet!" wailed Magpie. "Got any dry ones, Ike?"

"Two. But, before I find out if they're dry, I'm going to find something to set on fire."

Then I fell over a box and hit my head on the floor. That made me sore. I got up and kicked the box as hard as I could.

"Cut that out!" yelps Magpie. "Who hit me with that box? Who threw it?"

"Shut up!" I howls. "Nobody threw it—I kicked it! Reckon I tore a toe plumb off. Next time I——"

"Sh-h-h-h!" hisses Magpie. "Somebody coming! Let's get out."

He swung the door open and ducked out in the storm. That's just like Magpie. In danger he forgets his responsibility, and Ike Harper, who is very cool, picks up the two babies off the bunk and follers in his wake. Man, it sure was pouring out there. Ever' once in a while comes a flash of lightning, which is fine while she lasts but harder when she's gone. I sure flounders around a lot.

"This way, Ike!" yelps Magpie, and I follers the best I can.

A flash of light shows me a couple of fellers on horseback milling around in the rain, and then we sure hit the high spots out of there.

After a mile or so we stops in the shelter of a washout and puffs plentiful.

"Suffering sidewinders!" groans Magpie. "I ain't got no feet left! Honest to grandma, I'm a wreck from stem to stern, Ike."

"Feller sufferer, I know how you feel," says I. "But that ain't no reason for you to forget what you owes to humanity. I don't wish to chide no man for being absent-minded, Magpie, but I'm asking why you left me the responsibility of both offsprings in this direful e-mergency?"

"Meaning what?" he groans.

"Magpie Simpkins, do you mean to set there shivering and tell me that you got so scared that you forgot we had two suffering infants when we entered that cabin?"

"My ——!" he grunts. "You didn't forget yours, did you?"

"No, but you did, Mister Simpkins."

"Like ——! I've got mine."

"Well," says I after due consideration, "somebody did. I've got two."

And then three voices blended in the night air. The last one seemed to be a little bit stronger than the others.

"Suffering sidewinders!" wails Magpie. "Where did the last one come from? I thought this was a cow country and I finds it's kids. Hungry kids! Aw-w-w-w, shut up!"

They did. Magpie got up on his feet and fussed with a damp cigaret-paper.

"You've got to show 'em who's boss, Ike," he states. "They recognizes the voice of authority, and, believe me, I know how to quell 'em. Now we've got to take 'em home."

"Be it ever so humble," I agrees.

Then we pokes out into the damp night, Magpie ahead with the tenor and me behind, with the soprano and alto. It is becoming some perade, if you asks me.

They may be sweet little darlings—we ain't never gazed upon their faces—but I know that what I've called 'em under my breath ain't going to be of great cheer to 'em in the life to come.

ABOUT a mile farther on we sees the lights of a house and points our perade accordingly. We're too miserable to think of anything except making a wholesale delivery. Maybe Magpie had a vision of a pair of boots; I don't know.

"Do we lie to them about things, Magpie?" I asks as we nears the place.

"We do not, Ike. No more lies. A certain measure of precaution but not a prevarication. I won't be the father of triplets—not barefooted."

We stumbles right up to the door. Magpie hammers on the middle panel with the butt of his six-shooter.

A feller sticks his head out of the door and stares at us. He's got a face like a full moon.

"Ahem!" says Magpie. "Have you got any babies?"

Bang! He slammed the door in our face, and we hears him drop a bar across it. Then from the window we hears:

"Mosey, you bums! Hop out or pick lead out of your hide the rest of your lives."

We went. Also and moreover we went fast.

"What do you think you're doing—taking the census?" I asks when we're out of shotgun range and stops to gather our wind.

"What do you reckon I ought to have asked him—if he wanted any babies?"

"Why speak of them at all? We could 'a' sneaked in and then came away without 'em, Magpie."

"Yeah? You never have, Ike. You usually add instead of subtract; so I'm making a few inquiries before I take a chance. *Sabe?*"

We pilgrims along for a while sort of aimless-like.

"Where had we ought to go now?" wonders Magpie.

"——!" says I.

"Brilliant thought," agrees Magpie. "They say that all babies are angels; so so you'd be safe—that's a cinch."

"They don't wear yaller boots there; so that would help some," says I.

Under ordinary circumstances I reckon we would have argued the point; but the triplets start a concert, and we decides to pilgrim on. The rain still visits the earth, and, if you think it's any cinch trying to walk in the dark with rain in your eyes and a squalling baby on each arm, you're all wrong.

Pretty soon Magpie stops.

"Ike, I see another light. It may mean disaster, and it may mean deliverance. Shall we try it?"

"Any port in a storm, Magpie. Lead us to the light. My arms are cramped, and my ear-drums are sore, but I'm game for anything from milk to murder."

Magpie is some pilot, if you asks me. We drifted into a section of plowed ground which has got soaked with rain, and it hung to our feet like molasses. I sat down twice during the voyage, and we sure are a sticky-looking mess when we arrive at the door of that forlorn-looking shack.

Magpie knocks on the door. After a while we hears a commotion inside, and the door opens. The face that leans out to us looks like a busted mattress. The hair on it seems to grow straight ahead like the quills on a peevish porkypine.

"Milk?" pronounces Magpie.

The bushy-faced person seemed to take it under consideration.

"Milk?" says Magpie again.

"*Vizoffvufforskilloff?*" he asks deep-like.

The babies renew their concert, and the carbonated critter stretches his neck a little longer.

"*Mffvuffzizzskoyiffsky?*" he asks.

"Yes'm," says Magpie. "All three of 'em are."

The feller nods and spits out into the rain.

"Milk," states Magpie. "Milk for the babies."

"Beebus?" he asks. "*Skilloffvizzmffovitch?*"

Then he stepped back into the room.

"I didn't know you could talk Russian, Magpie," says I.

"Lot of things you don't know, Ike. Now we'll get the——"

Comes a lot of charged language and couple of squalls, and here comes Bushy-Face with a squalling infant on each arm. He stops in the doorway, and his haystack whiskers open in a wide grin.

"*Zoffuffzizzovitckski,*" says he proud-like.

"Don't mention it," says Magpie foolish-like. "You're welcome as the flowers in May."

Then he walks right away from there, leading me by the arm.

"What did he say?" I asks as we fall through a pole fence and skid out into another plowed field.

"——!" snorts Magpie, tearing the seat of his pants out of the mud, where he had sunk about a foot. "I don't know for sure, but I think he wanted to bet that his two could yelp louder than all three of ours."

"Let's go back," says I. "I've got forty-three dollars that says mine alone can out-yelp anything on earth."

"You'd lose," says Magpie sad-like. "I've got a high-class yelper myself Sweepstake entries, Ike."

Then came the cows. Range cows are funny critters and have strange and awful ideas on men on foot. The first thing we knowed we're plumb surrounded there in the dark and they're closing in on all sides, rattling their horns, talking low and doing other things that don't make us feel absolutely safe.

"Stand perfectly still, Ike," whispers Magpie. "They'll think we are part of the secenery."

We groups together and looks as much like inanimate objects as possible. The cows sniffs and grunts all around, wondering in cow talk what kind of a growth we are. Then Magpie's armful opens up—

"*Wa-a-a-a! Wa-a-a-a!*"

"*Ma-a-a-a-a! Yah-a-a-a-a!*" sings mine together.

Then I got kicked by a cow. Absolutely! The critter was so close to me when the chorus opens up that, when it whirls and starts to run, I got both hind feet in the calves of my legs.

They're so close to me that I says my evening prayer. Magpie lets a whoop out of his system—

"Grab one by the tail, Ike, and play safe!"

And then I gets a glimpse of his fish-pole figure disappearing out of the main herd, swinging on to the tail of a scared cow.

I've got a fat chance, with both arms full. I backs into a mesquite bush, shifts both babies to one arm and pulls my gun.

Man, I sure smoked up them fool cows, and they stampeded. One went past me so fast that the wind blew me backward, and, when I got my whole family together again, there ain't a cow in sight.

I yelps loud and long for Magpie, but he's likely still hanging on to that critter and pointed for parts unknown.

Then I plods on alone—that is, there's only three of us now. I'm sick in soul and body, and all I wants on this earth or the waters under the earth is a place to leave my bundles.

I got hung up on a barbed wire fence, losing a few inches of skin and my hopes for a reward in the hereafter, and all this time them two are keeping up a cross-fire of complaint. I tries to argue it out with 'em and then cautions myself out loud not to go too far, 'cause that's what gets folks into the loco lodge.

Then I sees another light. Ike Harper ought to be getting skittish about lights, but he's so near unto death that he loses his normal caution. Ike Harper is now a man unafraid.

I shifts the babies to one arm, grasps my empty gun in my right hand and hammers plentiful on that door.

MY KNOCK don't seem to awaken no response; so I walks inside. There's a lamp burning on the table, but nobody is in sight. I lays them offsprings on the bed and flops my aching bones into a chair.

My fingers are too stiff to even attempt to roll a smoke, and my arms are paralyzed. As soon as them kids hit the bed, they seems to ease off on the wailing, and my ears gets a needed rest. I sets there for a while, getting more normal all the time, and, when I hear noises outside, my nature asserts itself, and I crawls under the bed. Somebody is coming; my gun is empty, and I don't feel like thinking up a lie.

Here they come, swearing and rattling. The door slams open, and they all clumps inside.

"Wife's over at Jones'," states a voice which comes in behind the bunch. "She slipped and sprained her ankle, Zeb."

Several voices seems to all talk to once, but I seem to gather that somebody has been caught and deserves hanging. I sees a pair of big bare feet and a torn pants leg. When I peeks out a little more, I sees a rope hanging from above the feet.

"This is sure going hard with you, feller!" says a voice above the rest.

Then I hears Magpie's voice, resigned-like:

"Why say 'hard'? Human beings can't hand me nothing more than I've already been through."

"Here! Keep them dogs out of here!" yelps a voice. "Danged bloodhounds will track this carpet all up! Get under the bunk! Danged lop-earned trailers!"

They got under the bunk, all right. Four of 'em! All muddy and sloppy and full of affection, and they sure licked Ike Harper's face around and around, upside down and crossways. They guzzled in my ears and rubbed noses with me, and I had to take it. After my bath they seems to sort of quiet down, and I hears what the men are saying.

"No; the kid's all right," states somebody. "Maybe it's hungry."

"Poor little Oscar!" squeaks some feller. "Lemme see him, Zeb. I ain't never see him."

"Sure thing, Otie. Never seen Oscar, eh?"

Comes a shuffling of feet, somebody clears their throat, and then silence. Even them danged hounds seem to feel the silence. Then I hears somebody clear their throat apologetic-like and say:

"Mister, I—I—we begs your pardon. Take that rope off him, Abe. Your story didn't sound like much to us; so— Well, dang it all, we're sorry, mister. Honest to gosh we are. Ain't we, fellers?"

"Such is Gospel," agrees somebody else. "From now on I believes what I hears. Take your baby, old trailer, and go free as air. There ain't nobody doubting your honesty. Our mistake."

I hears a shuffling noise; the door shuts soft-like, and then all is silence again.

"——!" says somebody. "Don't seem possible that it wasn't one or the other."

"I'm plumb glad my wife wasn't able to come home," states a voice, which I reckon is the father of one of my bunch. "The shock might 'a' killed her."

"*Wa-a-a-a! Ma-a-a-a-a!*"

Even the bloodhounds got excited, and I got licked all over again. A feller can protect himself from one dog's affections, but, when four get him down under a bed and set on his chest, he ain't got much show.

"Gee mighty gosh, this is little Oscar!" yelps one of them fellers, dancing a jig.

"This one is Pete Patton's Emmeline!" yelps another. "Pete, this is your Emmeline! Gee-lory!"

Everything gets sort of mulliganed again. The place is filled with so much joy that the hounds get infected, and they sure scrubbed my face plentiful again.

"Going to take Oscar right over to the wife!" whoops a voice.

"Foller me and Emmeline!" yelps the other. "Come on, boys! I know where there's a keg of ten-year-old hooch. Come on!"

Nobody invited me and the dogs. As soon as everybody is gone, I crawls out of there. Them four man-trailers looks at me with such solemn expressions in their sad eyes that I ain't got the heart to chide 'em.

"You pups want to go with me?" I asks, and they wags their tails.

"Come on," says I. "I never did like to wash my own face."

We pilgrims out into the rain, and after a while we hit the railroad track again. It ain't good walking, but a railroad track will get you some place if you foller it long enough. And that's what I did. I ain't had nothing to eat for so long that I'm beginning to wish for something—even milk.

Then comes daylight. I'd say that Ike Harper ain't much to look at. He ain't got no hat, and the real estate lieth thick upon him. Some sheep are drifting along, and I finds the shepherd standing on the track. As I come up, he grins and says—

"Lookin' fer a baby?"

My gun was empty, but rocks are plentiful. I chased that shepherd across country until one of my hounds runs between my legs and tripped me. Then I went back to the track and pilgrimed on.

Later on I comes to a town, which is what will happen to anybody if they follers a railroad long enough. I pilgrims up to the depot. In the shade of the building I sees a familiar figure setting on the edge of the platform. I sets down beside him.

There's some crackers and cheese and sardines scattered around him, and I helps myself, while I watches him try to get his feet into a pair of new boots—yaller boots, too.

"Can I help you?" I asks.

But he yanks the boots away and sets on 'em.

"Not this pair!" he snorts, producing a pair of tweezers.

I watches him dig out a few more cactus spines and then try to get a number seventeen foot into a number twelve boot. He groans, puts the boots away and slips a pair of moccasins on his feet. Then he sighs and rolls a smoke.

"I delivered Oscar and Emmeline," says I.

He squints at me and nods solemn-like. Then he says:

"I gave George Washington to his maw."

We both nods. Then pretty soon he says—

"She got off the train to mail a letter, and the train pulled out and left her here. She wired to Cut Bank, which is the next stop, but the danged telegraph system got caught in the storm and lost its voice. She's been whooping it up and down this here platform ever since. She hugged me seventeen times, Ike, when she finds it belongs to her, and I reckon I—I hugged her some, too."

I finished up the rest of the lunch. Magpie got to his feet.

"Want to show you something, Ike."

He limped around to the door of the depot, and I follered him. Near the door he stops and points at the floor. There's a wet spot and a lot of busted glass. One piece of glass is still holding on to a rubber mouthpiece.

"Know what that is?" he asks.

I shakes my head.

"Bottle," says he wise-like. "Bottle which contained milk for Georgie."

"What's the answer, Magpie?"

"When I gave Georgie to his maw, that bottle fell out of his blanket."

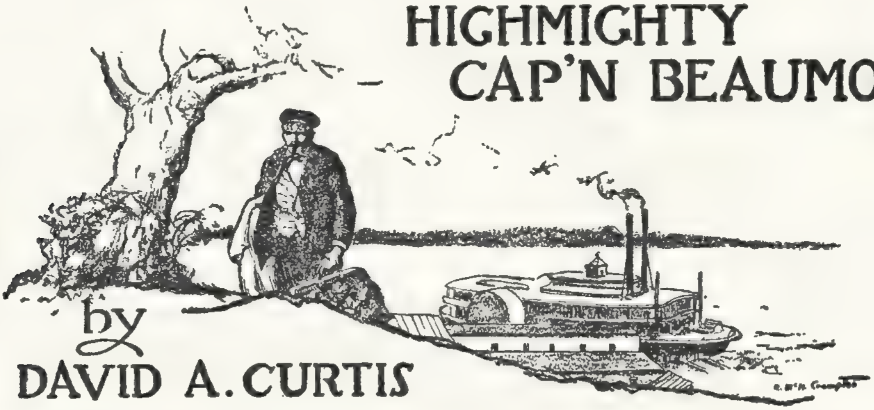
"My ——!" says I. "Was it there all the time?"

"You didn't see anybody put it there, did you?" he asks sarcastic-like.

We sat down on the edge of the platform and communed with our thoughts. After a while I says:

"Magpie, it's easy to figure that the kidnaper got scared and left that baby in that shack, but what I don't understand is this: All little babies being more or less alike in the face, how in —— did them men know at a glance that your baby wasn't little Oscar?"

"Huh! I never seen Oscar myself, Ike, but I'd 'a' known it wasn't Oscar. Little Georgie's father was the porter that blacked my yaller boots, Ike."



HIGHMIGHTY CAP'N BEAUMONT

by DAVID A. CURTIS

MORE things than ever were told happened on the Mississippi River when the steamboats plying it were the finest and best of their kind in the world. Many of those things never will be told, for the actors are dead, their deeds are forgotten, the stage-setting has disappeared and the curtain has been rung down forever on the vivid drama of life and adventure that had so long a run on the boards of the floating palaces that once plied the mighty Father of Waters.

Caleb Dunn, however, still lives—or did not long ago, when I met him in the old French Market in New Orleans—and Caleb Dunn was in his day a picturesque feature in that drama, though he played a subordinate part, being for the better part of a long life barkeeper on one and another of these boats. His last place was on the famous old packet, *City of Natchez*, and, when she finally went out of commission, the old man, disheartened by the passing away of all the old-time zest and glamour of river life, retired to an obscure corner in the French quarter of the city he loved better than any other place on land. From that time on he lived in the past, eating his heart meanwhile. Here is one thing he told me:

I RECKON Cap'n Beaumont was nigh 'bout the highmightiest man what ever ran a boat on th' ol' Mississippi! 'Cordin' to what they said, he was reel quality when he was young. The Beaumonts bein' one o' the oldest famblies in Loozianny an' ownin' one time mo' land an' niggers 'n anybody knowed how much they was.

Didn't make no gre't diff'rence to him

how much they had been, though, bein' 's his pa done throwed nigh 'bout all on it away afo' he died, leavin' the cap'n tol'able po'. Them creole spo'ts sho' was high rollers them days. Didn't think nothin' o' puttin' up a plantation or a couple o' hundred niggers ag'in' New Orleans reel estate into a poker game.

They wa'n't nothin' much left fo' the cap'n a'ter his pa's creditors was all paid, on'y a half int'rest in the old *Creole Belle*, what was one o' the crack boats that yeah, an', 'stead o' sellin' that an' throwin' the money away, he done took c'mand of her an' run her his own self till she bust her b'iler three or fo' yeahs later on. After that he didn't had no need o' nothin'—bein's his remains wa'n't never picked up.

He sho' did run her fo' all she was wuth them three years, though. He'd done been c'nsid'able of a spo't his own self afo' his pa done passed away, but I never seen him touch a cyard a'terwards, an' just nachully they wa'n't no horse-racin' nor chicken-fights abo'd the boat. But he'd race the *Creole Belle* agin any o' the other boats on the river anytime, fo' money or fun, an' she never got beat till the time I spoke of when she bust her b'iler.

I reckon likely that wouldn't 'a' happened when it did, on'y the *Belle o' the Bayou*, what was a new boat that yeah, was grajally gittin' ahead, an' Cap'n Beaumont begin feedin' his furnace with hams, havin' a deck-load of 'em abo'd.

But that ain't neither hyar nor thar. What I was tellin' was him bein's highmighty as he was. 'Peared like it come nachul to him, bein' quality at the b'ginnin', like I said; but 'peared like it growed on him some a'ter he done begin running the boat. It got to be a d'sease, like, an' I quit the *Creole Belle* an' went on to the *City of Natchez*. A'ter that I never made no change. 'Peared like they wouldn't be no sense into it, bein's I couldn't never 'xpect fo' to git no such luck nex' time. 'Twa'n't mo'n about a week a'ter I done lef' the *Creole Belle* when her b'iler bust.

O' co'se, I didn't had no means o' knowin' what she was gwine to do, an' I didn't quit 'long o' that. Likely I'd 'a' stayed an' been among them 't was missin', on'y fo' Cap'n Beaumont bein' 's highmighty 's he was.

Quality was al'ays thataway, mo' 'r less. I done seen a heap on 'em afo' an' sinct I knowed him, an' 'peared like it came nachul to 'em, some way. They'd cuss a nigger all up in a heap an' mebbe have 'em whipped if they was any 'casion to, but they was mighty good to 'em at that—an' the niggers knowed it an' loved 'em when they was reel quality.

But yo' wouldn't never hear no quality cussin' a po' white. Just nachully they didn't had nothin' to do with 'em. I reckon mebbe that was what made Cap'n Beaumont 's diff'rent 's he came to be a'ter he done run his boat fo' a spell—that an' havin' hard luck with his mates.

The mates was like the overseers on the plantations. What they done was mostly keepin' the rousters at work. They was po' whites they own selfs, but just nachully the cap'n had mo' 'r less to do with 'em, an' they'd be times when he'd be 'bleedged to cuss 'em out. Thataway Cap'n Beaumont 'peared to git so's 't he done lose sight o' the diff'rence, an' he begin to c'nsider what po' whites an' niggers was nigh 'bout the same.

Bein' behind the bar, like I al'ays has been sinct I growed up, I ain't never been 'customed to bein' cussed 'thouten the priv'ledge o' cussin' back. An', bein' 's just nachully I couldn't cuss the cap'n o' the boat, I done quit.

But that ain't neither hyar nor thar, neither. 'Twa'n't nothin' to Cap'n Beaumont that I done quit. They was a plenty what was willing to take my place, bein' 's how the *Creole Belle* was the crack boat she was an' just nachully they was good money tendin' bar on bo'd of her.

Them days trav'lin' the river wa'n't noways like gittin' abo'd a railroad. Yo' c'n git some place ridin' into a cyar, but they ain't no pleasure into it. But, if yo' went abo'd a boat, they was mo' 'njoyment 'n a dog fight. They was somepin' diddin' from start to finish.

First off, they was al'ays a poker game. Most gen'ly they wouldn't be nobody playin' till the boat started, but a'ter that 'twouldn't be no time afo' they'd be a call fo' a deck o' cyards fr'm the bar, an' fr'm that time on they was al'ays a chanst fo' anybody to set in what wanted to play. The p'fessionals seen to that. If one game was full, they'd start another.

Them p'fessionals sho' was pizen. They say they's honor among thieves, but, if a p'fessional was to have honor doled to him afo' the draw, he'd throw it in the discyard an' call fo' three, ruther'n to hold it up with a pa'r o' deuces an' take two. I reckon it'd be good poker at that, bein's he couldn't never draw nothin' to better it, not in no game with p'fessionals into it. An', if he helt it, it'd play mo' —— with the game 'n a joker does—what they tell me some plays poker with it.

Cap'n Beaumont 'peared to have the same gen'l idea o' p'fessionals what I al'ays had, but they wa'n't nobody them days reckoned they was any way to git shut of 'em. Ev'rybody played, an' p'fessionals was looked at like they was kyind o' nec'ary, same as mates an' overseers. Nobody liked 'em, but they was put up with, bein's how they just was. I seen Cap'n Beaumont lookin' at 'em mo'n onc't, though, like he wanted to throw 'em overbo'd.

They wa'n't none on 'em was no good, but I reckon if they was one on 'em what was wuss'n another, 'twas Cal Huntoon. They was a one-eyed man what some said was the wust o' the lot, but he didn't had nothin' on Cal. I never knowed the two on 'em to set in together, but, if they had, I reckon the river'd ha' been tore up by the roots afo' the game was over.

I never knowed o' Cap'n Beaumont settin' in with the one-eyed man, neither, them days when he done played poker, afo' his pa died. But them that knowed him them days done said what him an' Cal Huntoon was into a game together one night when the cyards was runnin' Cal's way tol'able strong, like they gen'ly done when he set in, an' Cap'n Beaumont done lose his wad. He wa'n't cap'n then. They called him "Young Luke," an' his pa "Old Luke," Beaumont; but he was some highmighty even then, though he wa'n't nothin' but a striplin'.

THE game was in "Big Jim" Coulin's place on Canal Street, an', when Young Luke got up, broke, Big Jim says to him what he c'n have mo' chips if he likes, bein's his credit's good. But Young Luke says no. Says he reckons he won't play no mo' just then, not bein' satisfied none too well with how the cyards was runnin'.

Them was tol'able nigh bein' fightin' words, an' just nachully Big Jim done as't him if they was anythin' meant by 'em.

" 'Pears like yo'-all is talkin' some too much, thouten yo's gwine to say mo'," he says.

Cal didn't say nothin', him bein' a house player an' Big Jim bein' the p'prietor o' the place, but he looked up like he was c'nsiderable interested.

But Young Luke, he says what he don't p'pose to say no mo', bein's he ain't got no proof, on'y a gen'l idee. But Gawd he'p the man what plays crooked when he's settin' in if he ever finds it out fo' sho'.

Well, just nachully that was wuss'n what he done said afo'. But Big Jim wa'n't yearnin' fo' no trouble with 's good a customer 's him, and Cal Huntoon done seen it; so he speaks up.

"I reckon the Lawd ain't a gwine outen his way none to he'p nobody what's caught playin' crooked poker," he says. "P'int is fo' to make sho' first off an' then shoot."

Young Luke don't say nothin' to that, but he don't never go to Big Jim's no mo'. An', a'ter his pa died, he don't play poker no mo', like I said afo'.

That was how came I never seen him play, my own self. But them that had, said they wa'n't no better player 'n him nowheres, 'thouten 'twas some o' the best o' the p'fessionals—an' they was a gen'l idee among 'em that the *Creole Belle* wa'n't no very good place fo' to be tryin' no fancy tricks, not if Cap'n Beaumont was in the s'loon when the game was on.

Mo' special they reckoned thataway a'ter he done broke up a game one night when "Buck" Taylor was aimin' to do up a couple o' suckers what was settin' in with him. Cap'n Beaumont didn't say nothin', but he done reached acrost the table fr'm where he stood an' grabbed Buck's left wrist suddint, shakin' a ace outen his sleeve.

Buck was as suddint as he was, an' he pulled his gun all right. But the cap'n he twisted his wrist so bad he sent him sprawlin' acrost the table, an' somebody grabbed the gun afo' he c'd use it.

When the cap'n seen what he didn't had no gun, he done left go o' Buck an' kyind o' brushed his hands together like he was trying to rub dirt offen 'em. Then he sent a nigger fo' to fetch the mate into the s'loon. Bein's they didn't nobody know just what was gwine to be did, they was a kind o' awk'ard pause till the mate come. Buck Taylor, he done started fo' to go out on deck, not havin' no mo' fight left into him. But they was three or fo' men got in b'twixt him an' the do', an' he seen they wa'n't gwine to leave him go; so he stopped.

When the mate come, Cap'n Beaumont, he says:

"Put that man asho'. I'll stop the boat till yo' git back."

An' he turns away an' walks outen the s'loon.

Afo' he gits to the do', Buck speaks up.

"I reckon I got to go," he says, "bein's yo'-all says so, but yo' wouldn't turn a man loose in the woods 'thouten his gun, would yo'? Gimme that back, an' I ain't a sayin' nothin'."

'Peared like that was some reas'nable, fo' the woods was tol'able wild 'long where we was just then—bein' c'nsid'able ways below the mouth o' the St. Francis, whar it's a wilderness fo' sho'—but the cap'n he never turns his head. Just walks along like he didn't heard what Buck says, an' Buck goes asho' thouten his gun.

They didn't nobody never hear Cap'n Beaumont say nothin' 'bout it a'ter that, but just nachully they was a heap o' talking did—mo' special among the p'fessionals when they wa'n't nothin' never heerd about Buck Taylor f'm the time he done lef' the boat. The mate got back some quicker 'n he was liable to, an' they was some reckoned what he heaved Buck overbo'd ruther 'n to take the time to row asho'. But they wa'n't no way o' tellin', bein's 'twas a monstrous dark night, an' he never said nothin', neither.

Anyways, somepin' 'peared to done spread the fear o' the Lawd round tol'able heavy 'mongst the p'fessionals, fo' they was mighty few on 'em traveled the *Creole Belle* a'ter that—an' what they was 'peared to be some skeert. They'd set in when they got a chance, but they wa'n't none on 'em never caught playin' crooked a'ter that, on'y onc't.

That was Cal Huntoon. 'Peared like they wa'n't nothin' 'd put the fear o' the Lawd into him. 'Cordin' to what I done hear'd later on, they was c'nsiderable talk in Coulin's place 'bout what Cap'n Beaumont done done to Buck Taylor, but Cal didn't say nothin' fo' some time. Bimeby somebody said what 'peared like 'twa'n't wuth while fo' no p'fessionals to travel the *Creole Belle* no mo', bein's Cap'n Beaumont was interferin' with the way they gen'ly played.

Then Cal, he says what he don't 'low nobody to tell him how he sh'll play poker, an' one thing led to another till they was somebody offered to bet him what he wouldn't dast play a p'fessional game on the *Creole Belle*.

Just nachully they couldn't nobody ha' kep' him offen the *Creole Belle* a'ter that, bein's they done dasted him an' he took the bet. He done win it, too, but he didn't never c'lect the money.

Way o' that was this. He done come abo'd, chipper as a pointer pup, just as we was startin' out f'm New Orleans, an', seein' Cap'n Beaumont on the deck, he done bowed, p'lite, an' says, "Howdy, Cap'n," like they hadn't nothin' never happened b'twixt 'em. The cap'n, he done seen him an' heerd him, all right, but he never took no mo' notice of him 'n if he'd ha' been a lump o' mud. If the circumstants had ha' been diff'rent, they'd ha' been a rookus right then an' thar, fo' Cal Huntoon sho' was one fightin' man.

But they didn't nobody ondertake to put up no fight with the cap'n of a boat on the Mississippi River them days, not on bo'd o' the boat—'thouten he was fo'ced to, bein' 'tacted his own self. An' then, too, Cal done had his bet on to his mind, I reckon; so he done swallered the insult, an', judgin' f'm the look on his face, I reckon it must ha' tasted some bitter.

He kep' outen the cap'n's way a'ter that till long to'ds midnight the cap'n come in the s'loon fo' to take a look round like he al'ays done afo' he turned in. What he seen was enough to keep him f'm turnin' in fo' a spell, but he didn't say nothin', not right away he didn't.

Thar was Cal settin' into a game o' poker with a other p'fessional an' three planters what was gwine hum a'ter settlin' up with their factors fo' their crops. Just nachully they was totin' big wads, an' they 'peared to be some chanst fo' the two p'fessionals doin' 'em up tol'able well.

O' co'se, one way o' speakin', they wan't no call fo' nobody to say nothin', even if he seen crooked play, not 'thouten he was settin' into the game his own self. If a man seen fit to set in with p'fessionals, it was up to him to take what come, 'thouten he seen some 'casion fo' to pull a gun. But 'peared like Cap'n Beaumont wa'n't lookin' at it thataway. He come up to the table an' stood lookin' on at the game right behint Cal Huntoon, not sayin' nothin', like I said afo', but watchin' stiddy.

I dunno whether he'd heerd somepin'

'bout Cal's bet or whether he hadn't. But they was some of us had, an' we begin lookin' for a rough-house right away, bein' 's we knowed what a daredevil Cal was an' we'd done heerd what they wa'n't nobody liable to fool Cap'n Beaumont none, even if he didn't play no mo' his own self. I'd fetched in some drinks just afo' that, an', when I seen what was diddin', I just nachully stood round a spell.

I DIDN'T haf to wait on'y just long enough fo' the deal to come round to Cal Huntoon. The planter what set next to him had done put up his ante, reg'lar, an' the other p'fessional came in a'ter he done looked at his hand.

Cap'n Beaumont didn't say nothin' to that. 'Peared like he wa'n't int'rested. But, when the planter what set next picked up some chips fo' to put in the pot, the cap'n, he spoke up.

"I wouldn't 'dvise yo' to bet on to yo' hand this time, Mr. Mathews," he says. "This yer hellyon is done stacked the cyards."

On'y he said it mo' elegant-like 'n what I gen'ly talks, him havin' reel quality language. An' he spoke reel quiet-like an' d'lib'rate.

Cal was quicker'n seven cats, an' they wa'n't no question o' him bein' a fightin' man, like I said. He pulled his gun an' faced round quicker'n I ever seen it did, afo' nor sinct, but the cap'n was ready fo' him an' ek'ly as quick.

Afo' Cal c'd aim, the cap'n grabbed the gun his own self an' give a good exhibition o' what kyind of a fightin' man he was. He had some 'dvantage, bein' 's Cal done had to turn round to face him, but it looked like he didn't need none. They wa'n't time enough to look afo' the cap'n had him flat on his back on the flo', stampin' on his face with his heel.

Cal knowed he was licked, all right. I reckon he'd ha' been 'ntirely daid if the cap'n 'd stamped a couple o' times mo'. But he hollered, " 'Nuff," an' o' co'se the cap'n had to stop.

He wa'n't through, though. We uns c'd see that f'm his face afo' he said anythin'. Then he says:

"Yo' mis'able whelp, they's two things yo' c'n do. Yo' c'n go asho' in a rowboat, or yo' c'n have yo' gun back an' use it just once."

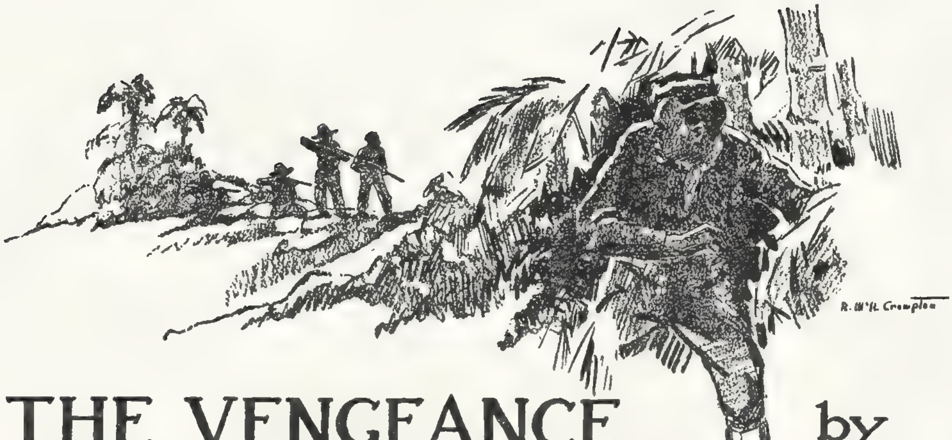
Cal must ha' knowed what he meant, fo' they couldn't nobody make no mistake, lookin' at the cap'n. But he says—

"I'll take the gun."

That's the only good thing I ever knowed that anybody c'd say of a p'fessional. When they done lose out, they al'ays paid.

"Very good," says Cap'n Beaumont. "Now git up an' climb over the rail just for'ard o' the paddle-wheel, an' I'll give yo' the gun. I heerd yo'-all say onc't what Gawd Almighty wouldn't put hisself out none to he'p a man what was caught playin' crooked into a poker game, an' I reckon yo' was nigh 'bout right. Anyways, they ain't nobody else gwine to he'p yo' none."

So we all goes on deck, an' Cal clumb over the rail, an' the cap'n hands him the gun. Bein's he done fell under the paddle-wheel, they didn't nobody never see him no mo'. An', 's far's I ever heerd, they wa'n't no p'fessionals never played poker no mo' abo'd the *Creole Belle.*



THE VENGEANCE OF ROONEY

by CLYDE B. HOUGH

Author of "Two Calls in the Jungle," "The Fingers of Home," etc.

A HALF-TIED tie, a wilted, dingy collar and a dozen more such neglects proved that he no longer had a white man's interest in himself. He had a florid complexion and a nervous trick of jerking his head to the right and looking over his shoulder as if afraid of something from behind. He stood behind a crude, wine-stained bar and wore a soiled white apron. He looked surprized when I entered the place and more so when I ordered a drink. After filling my glass, he leaned over the bar and stroked the chevrons on my sleeve slowly, tenderly.

"A sergeant," he said wistfully. "I was a sergeant once."

Then he fell silent, seemed to be conning over something in his mind.

"You are an odd one," I said. "Why the sentiment over a pair of chevrons? And why were you surprized when I came in?"

I had heard part of his story from old Sergeant Rooney, but I wanted, if possible, to make him tell me it all.

"A newcomer in Vigan?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Of course you are. Otherwise you wouldn't come in here. None of the soldiers do. You won't after you know."

"After I know what?" I asked, pretending, in order to draw him on.

"Sit there," he indicated a rickety table, "and I'll tell you."

I sat down, curious to hear. He came from behind the bar, took a seat opposite me, jerked his head to the right and looked over his shoulder, hitched his chair a little nearer the table and sat frowning—gathering up the threads of his story, I knew.

"YES, I was a sergeant," he said, evidently groping back to his former statement for a starting-point. "Brandon is the name. I was in Company B, ——th Infantry. I tell you all this because you are going to hear it, anyway—I may as well. Besides, it's pleasant to sit here talking to a white man. It brings glimmering sensations of the past.

"But that wasn't what I started out to tell you; so I'll go on with the story. The ——th came here to Vigan in 1904. The insurrection was settled then; even the *ladrone* chiefs had all been rounded up—which means that we had nothing to do but guard once a week and drill about an hour a day. Of course, there was the necessary work about camp, but you know how it is: a non-com. is not supposed to do that.

"Well, it was just the chance I had been waiting for—plenty of time to study. I had a fine record, a pretty fair education—three years at college—and a standing dream of shoulder-straps. So I made my application for promotion and began to cram for the preliminary examination. Everything was going fine, too. Our captain coached me quite a bit, and he said there was no doubt about my passing.

"Then one evening, when I had worried over a problem in geometry till my head was foggy, I went for a walk. The air was stifling and, wherever I walked, fine dust rose up and filled my nostrils. It was late at night, but still every living thing—except the natives—was astir, searching for just one cool breath.

"I turned into a narrow, unlighted street. Why, I don't know. Perhaps I had some vague idea of getting away from it all, of finding some spot set off. Or perhaps, again, it was just plain fate."

Here he jerked his head to the right and glanced over his shoulder and then resumed his telling, speaking rapidly.

"But what I really did find was Don Carlos Cervera. The old fellow was down in the dirt, with a wild-eyed native clinging to him like a barnacle—I could see, mind you, because the moon was high and full—and probing for his heart with a thin-bladed dagger. I kicked the little devil loose and called the guard. We didn't know the Spaniard by name at that time, but there was only one pointed, gray beard in Vigan, and we knew where the beard always came from and where it always returned to.

"So we took the don home, and the guard who helped me went back to his duty. But I stayed and did what I could till the doctor came. And, while I worked over the old man, trying to stanch the blood in his chest, a vision came and fluttered about the bed and spilled tears out of big brown eyes.

"The vision was Molita Cervera, the don's daughter; and I was done for from the first splash of the first tear. Molita was a killer, nothing less. She had grace and vivacity from the Spanish race and a seductive, clinging nature from her Filipino mother. In short, Molita was a beautiful mestizo.

"Well, after an hour or so the doctor had the don patched up and able to talk. Then the old boy told me his gratitude in that profuse way the Spanish have. He also begged me to make his house my home whenever I wished. I made use of the invitation often and made love to Molita regular. She was not displeased, either. Still, she never allowed me to feel sure. This, of course, made me want her all the more.

"So I let my studies go and devoted my time to Molita. As a result, examination time drew near and I was not ready. There was nothing to do but withdraw my application; I did it and was happy in the doing. I would have withdrawn my chance at heaven just as freely had that given me more time with Molita.

"Well, the months went by, and I courted her almost daily. Then one night, as we sat on the white sand near the lapping waves, Molita slipped her arms around my neck, laughed softly and told me how much she loved me and how long she had loved me. And, like my love, hers dated back to that first night. She had been playing with me all those months, enjoying the rise and fall of my hopes. She had to. It is the native cruelty of her sex, a something they have no control over.

"Then followed a period of plans and air-castles. We were to be married as soon as my time in the service expired. The don, who approved of the match—it was better than he had expected for Molita—was going to start me in business in a small way. I was to be a pioneer in Americanizing Philippine commerce. I had lost all interest, whatever, in promotion in the Army. I think I felt, then, much the same as the early colonists in America must have felt.

"About that time the 'Runt' appeared. From some outfit in the States, he was transferred to Company B. He was so insignificant in so many different ways that he was uncommon. His name was of the commonest—Jones. Henry Jones, to be exact. Just how he got into the Army no one is quite sure. It is a safe bet, however, that they roughed up his hair when they measured him for height. Also, somebody must have had a foot on the scale when the doctor read his weight.

"In Company B we dubbed him the Runt, and it fitted. His tightly buttoned military blouse never fitted him so well as did that name.

"Now, can you imagine any woman throwing over a life-size man for a specimen like the Runt? You can not. No one can. Still, that is just what Molita did. And the Runt didn't start it, either; she started it. First she took to having him at the house and then to walking with him on the beach in the evenings. And when I protested, she very haughtily told me that I had no right to object. I, the man she was engaged to, had no right to object.

"Well, I saw then that it was useless trying to do anything with her; so I went to the Runt and told him to stay away from my girl or count on getting the almightiest beating he ever packed around. Well, sir, if you'll believe me, that little fleck of humanity was game clean through and back again. He stood right up to me—a great big gorilla like me—and told me that I might as well start in then, that he would go to see the *señorita* whenever the *señorita* chose to let him go. I knew, too, by the way he said it that it was Gospel truth. So I took his advice and 'started in.'

"Of course he had no chance from the first, but just the same he fought back. Well, I cut his lips and bruised his cheeks, blacked his eyes and mashed his nose, and still he fought back. I knocked him down, and he clambered up and staggered in for more, and I put him down again and again. Then, when he could no longer rise up, I took him by the collar, held him off at arm's length and smashed his face at will. I couldn't stop him from going to see Molita, but I had made up my mind to send him to her dished up in proper style; and I did, too.

"But it was the big mistake. It wiped out any remaining chance that I might have had with Molita. From the minute she saw the Runt's face, he was a martyr in her eyes, something to be pitied and mothered. On the other hand, she told me in no uncertain terms just what kind of a brute I was and just how little she wanted to see of me. I had lost. No doubt about it."

At this moment, a native customer came in and Brandon went behind the bar to serve him, while I sat and checked his tale up by what Rooney had already told me.

The native drank his drink and went out. Brandon came back to the table, jerked his head to the right, glanced over his shoulder and sat down.

"A FEW days after the break with Molita," he resumed, "a company of constabulary that was stationed at Baguio mutinied, took all the rations, arms and ammunition they had in store and fortified themselves on the highest mountain in the Banguet Range. So Company B was sent to teach them the error of their ways. And Lieutenant Gordon, a young lieutenant just out of West Point, was in command; I was second in command, and the Runt was in the ranks.

"The mutineers' position was accessible in only one way. By means of a broad ravine that furrowed down the mountain from summit to foot-hills. Our plan was to enter the ravine under cover of darkness, climb about two thirds of the way up, rest till just before dawn and then attack the rebels while they slept soundest. The plan was good, too, but our guide jobbed us—took us up the wrong ravine. After we had worked, slowly and carefully, more than half-way up to the rebel stronghold, the ravine ended at the base of a natural stone wall.

"The wall was at least fifty feet straight up and impossible to climb. So we undertook to climb the steep banks of the ravine and were promptly met by an avalanche of rolling, bounding stones. Then Gordon tried to take us back the way we had come, but he found the lower end of the ravine swarming with rebels. We were trapped completely, and there was no doubt but what we had more than one company to deal with. We learned later that three other companies from different towns had revolted and joined the first.

"After making sure that we were surrounded by a force too large to deal with, the lieutenant called me aside, and we discussed the next best thing to do. One thing was sure: we had to get word to Vigan somehow. And the only way we knew to do that was to get a man past the rebels. So Gordon told me to go out and tell the men what had to be done and ask for a volunteer.

" 'Better detail a man,' I told him.

" 'Why?' he asked.

" 'Well, in the first place,' I said, 'if you ask for a volunteer, you are apt to get some big, awkward ham who'll uproot a couple of trees and give the whole game away before he gets ten feet up the bank. Then, again, the whole outfit may volunteer, and in that case you'll have to pick a man, anyway. So my advice is to pick the right man in the beginning and save time and risk.'

" 'Whom do you suggest?' he asked.

" 'Private Jones, sir. He has plenty of

nerve, and he is small and light and not likely to make much noise. Besides, if they do see or hear him, he makes a small target to shoot at and our chance of getting relief will be that much greater.'

"Did I believe what I said? Why, it was not a matter of belief. All I did was to state visible facts. My argument was one-hundred-proof logic with nothing against it. Had there been nothing between the little man and myself, I might have done the same; I probably would. Nevertheless, as it was, I suggested the Runt purely because there were ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that he would never get through.

"Anyway, Gordon was inexperienced and glad enough to have the advice of some one who had seen service. So he told me to send the Runt to him for instructions.

" 'Jones,' said the lieutenant, 'our only hope of getting out of this trap is to get a message through to Vigan. For several reasons, I think you are the man best fitted for the job. However, I don't want to send any man on duty like this unless he is willing to go. The chance that you will get through alive is very small—Jones, are you willing to take that chance?'

" 'Yes, sir,' said the Runt without a quiver.

" 'All right,' said Gordon; 'there is only one thing to do: find the darkest place you can and start to work your way up.'

"Gordon was sitting on a rock, and he reached up and gripped the Runt's hand. Neither of them said a word; they just shook, silent. Then their hands fell apart, and the Runt turned and walked away. I remember well how he looked as he crossed a small open space just before the darkness swallowed him up. The white moonlight stamped him indelibly on my memory. His head was a little forward, and his face was as solemn, as unmoved, as any boulder studded in the bank above him."

At this juncture Brandon stopped a moment, jerked his head to the right and looked over his shoulder. It seemed to me that he shuddered ever so slightly.

"About half an hour after the Runt had gone," Brandon began again, "we heard quite a few scattering shots; too many to count.

" 'It will be a miracle if they don't bring him down,' said Gordon hopeless-like.

"We all knew they were shooting at the Runt, and we felt a good deal like a funeral-party. That is, all but me—and I felt like something worse. But after that one storm of shots there was nothing to tell us how it was with the Runt. So the men planted themselves about in the shelter of boulders and overhanging banks and passed the time by a shot, now and then, at some mutineer who was bold enough to show his head.

"The mutineers, too, did their bit to relieve the monotony. Whenever one of our boys would break cover, he was saluted with the crack of a rifle or maybe a shower of rocks. And so the thing dragged along until late afternoon of the next day.

"The sun was just beginning to edge down below the tree tops. There was no longer any hope that the Runt had got through, and Gordon had decided to start three men out by three different directions as soon as it was dark. Gordon and I were both crouched under one big boulder, and he was asking me who would be the three best men to send. All at once there was a succession of volleys from down the mountainside. There was no mistaking those volleys; they were too uniform ever to have been fired by constabulary.

"The next we knew, there was a flock of shirts, handkerchiefs and most anything that happened to be white waving above us on both banks. The rebels had dropped their arms wherever they stood and quit without even making a fight. With the whole regiment there to do the job, rounding up the prisoners and herding them into small groups, so that each company could take a group, was quick work. And, before darkness closed down, we were on our way back to Vigan. Of course we supposed, now, that the Runt had got through after all.

" 'How was the Runt when he got in?' I asked my friend, Sergeant Rooney, as soon as the word to march in route order had been passed.

" 'SURE an' the poor lad niver cumed in at all, at all,' said Rooney. 'Thim onchristian haethens kilt him afore he was three hundred yards frum the ravine where ye was cooped up. 'Twas one of their own that brung the word of yer plight. The beggar thought to save his own pelt by cumin' to the colonel an' squealin' on his comrades.'

"When I heard that the Runt was dead, a cold fear gripped me—fear of seeing the body, of following it to its final resting-place. The very thought made my knees weak. I was sure I could not stand up in the dead man's presence, and I began to wonder how I could avoid the funeral.

" 'He has been dead nearly two days now,' I said. 'When do you suppose they will bury him?'

" 'Tis done already,' said Rooney. 'The colonel left that to me, an', so soon as I see the poor lad, I see that he must be interred at once. What wid the sun an' the bullet-holes, he'd been out of the ground too long as it was. But I said a Christian prayer over him. Yes, sir, I prayed my patron saint to put a curse on the divil that's responsible for his death.'

"My nerves jerked like a hooked fish at Rooney's last sentence. Did he know the truth? Sure, he did. They all did; they were not fools. Still the days and weeks which followed proved that they had guessed nothing. But I am getting ahead of the story again.

"Back at Vigan I did not go at once to Molita. I must have been afraid of her intuition—all women have it, you know—or perhaps I felt that the truth I knew was so fresh in my mind that it would betray itself. At any rate, I purposely avoided Molita for weeks and left the others to tell her the bad news. And, when I did finally allow myself to meet her on the street, I greeted her merely as a friend.

"Half sad and half ashamed, she invited me to call, and, as she ceased to grieve, I gradually won back to a place in her affection. But it was not my old place I had gained; somehow it was different. There was something between us, if you know what I mean.

"About three months went by, and then things began to happen thick and fast. First, my enlistment expired and we were married. Shortly after that one of the don's enemies—he had a long-standing feud with some of the natives—slipped some steel between the old boy's ribs, and he passed out. Then, when his financial affairs had been settled, I found that there was very little money left—not enough to start any kind of a business in Manila. So I opened this saloon here and did pretty well for a while.

"But the word finally got around that I was responsible for the choice of a messenger in that constabulary affair. And the men, knowing all that they did, were quick to draw a conclusion—an accurate one, too. However, they could prove nothing. Acting in my official capacity, I had given advice on my best judgment. Who could say differently? Still, they knew, and that is why soldiers do not come in my saloon; that is why I was surprized when you came in, and that is why you will not come again.

"As for the rest—well, after I had been married to Molita about six months, I went home one night and found her gone. She had taken all her clothes and most everything else that was worth taking, a hundred and fifty dollars in gold included. I have learned since that she's living with a native at a *barrio* about thirty miles south of here, but somehow I have never bothered about them; I don't care—don't care about anything. Rooney's prayer has sure been answered; his patron saint sure sent the curse."

He jerked his head to the right, looked over his shoulder and started to rise.

"Wait a minute, Brandon," I said. "Won't you tell me what it is that makes you look over your shoulder so often? What are you afraid of from behind?"

"It's the Runt," he answered. "I can feel him, always, standing just back of me; and sometimes I could swear that I hear him chuckle. Honestly, I believe he knows and gloats over me."

"YOU were right," I told him, "when you said Rooney's prayer had been answered. It has, and you've got no more than what you've deserved. But what would you say, Brandon, if I was to tell you that the Runt got through safe that night and came into Vigan—that he is not dead?"

Brandon did not get excited or jump up or exclaim aloud. He merely sat dumb — motionless — and looked at me. He was, no doubt, wondering why I should torture him thus. I waited till he showed signs of understanding and then continued:

"Sergeant Rooney and I were in the same company at Fort Myer, Virginia," I said, "and, when he heard that I was to be transferred out here to Vigan, he told me part of what you've told me tonight and some more, too, that you don't know about.

"In the first place, as Rooney told it to me, Jones is not the Runt's name. His name is Rooney, and he is Sergeant Rooney's son. He was in some outfit in the States, and they ragged him so much about his size that he deserted. Then he got to thinking how it was going to hurt the old sergeant's pride, being the father of a deserter; so he reenlisted under the name of Jones, figuring that he could serve one term as Jones, get an honorable discharge and on the strength of that have the desertion charge marked off his record and his name changed back to Rooney.

"At this stage of the game, that whimsical old girl we call 'Fate' stepped in and guided somebody's pen to write the name of Private Jones on the list of a detachment that was booked for Vigan.

"Well, you can imagine Rooney when he saw his own kid wearing the name of Jones. But he knew something was wrong; so he waited till he got the boy alone, and, when he heard what was up, to use his own words, he 'didn't know whether to kill the —— little monkey or kiss him.' Anyway, he decided to let things rock along as they were, which they did till that constabulary affair came up.

"Then, when you were talking to the lieutenant in the ravine that night, the Runt heard you and knew why you were jobbing him. But he wouldn't squeal. He took his chance and got through and came into Vigan between daybreak and sunup. Rooney was sergeant of the guard and the only one who saw the Runt come in.

"After the kid told his old man how things were up in the ravine, Rooney didn't bother about going to the officer of the day; he went straight to the colonel and took the Runt with him. And, while the kid was explaining the situation to the colonel, he got excited and called Rooney dad. So the cat was out of the bag, and they had to explain. Well, naturally, the colonel gave the Runt old Ned for deserting, but he ended by praising him for the good work he had done and by promising to see that his record was straightened out.

"But, when the colonel asked the Runt if he had volunteered to run the native lines, he said no and told why he had been detailed. When the colonel heard that part of it, he was furious and swore that he would have you court-martialed. Rooney was furious, too, but he had another plan. He had conceived the idea of telling you that the Runt was dead and letting you go free with your conscience to do the rest.

"The colonel agreed and, in order to make good the story, they got a native fisherman to take the Runt down the coast to San Fernando that morning. From there he went to Manila, where he joined his old regiment, was restored to duty and is still in the service."

"Man," said Brandon, "will you put that in writing over your name?"

"It's not necessary," I told him. "Rooney wrote a statement of the main facts over his name and asked me to hand it to you. He thinks your conscience has punished you enough by this time, and he is satisfied with his vengeance."

Brandon looked at the signed statement I handed him curiously—as a "lifer" might look at his pardon.

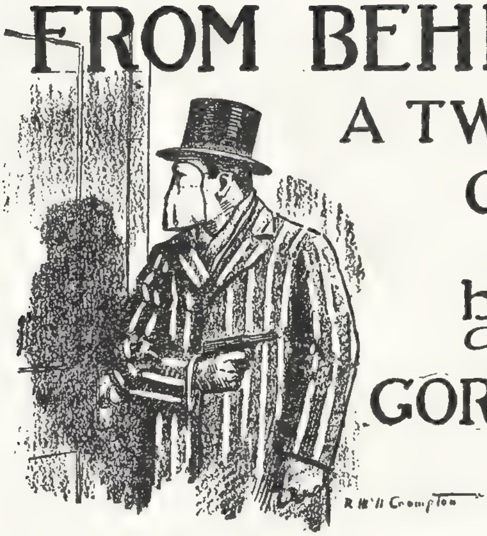
"And the Runt's not dead." He said it slowly, his voice incredulous.

Then his shoulders straightened up and squared perceptibly, and he continued, his tone firm, determined:

"I'm going back in the service. Oh, I know they'll sneer at first, but I'll stick, and I'll live it down."

FROM BEHIND MASKS

A TWO-PART STORY CONCLUSION



by

GORDON YOUNG

Author of "Gaboreau," "Gaboreau the Terrible," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

WHO is the mysterious Unknown, who, working secretly and with almost unlimited power, has been freeing criminal after criminal from jail? This was the question that puzzled me—Don Everhard—until I set out to find the answer and so got myself into one of the strangest tangles of my career.

The lowest crook got help from the Unknown. Once arrested, he had but to wait patiently until Waller, Waller & Ishman, a firm of shyster lawyers, received from some untraceable source the funds with which to bring about his release. Then, freed, he received instructions to report to the Unknown. Of this, of course, the police had no proof.

They resolved to get some. Gowan McFarland, a young relative of mine, was engaged as special detective, speedily got himself arrested for burglary and was released in the usual fashion, with instructions to report to one Felise Dobell in Washington—and then was found with his throat cut. The Unknown had discovered that he was a spy.

IN ONE of his pockets was a note in the handwriting of my former wife, Vivian. Vivian had divorced me. My years as a professional gambler had made me too cold and unemotional for so vivacious a woman as she, she said. Then she disappeared. I was worried, for I still loved her. I thought at first that my old enemy, Gaboreau, had kidnaped her to bother me, but a trip to his house left me as much in the dark as ever.

Then my jeweler found a clue. A woman named Clare Goold was seen with a pair of earrings that had belonged to Vivian. I followed Clare Goold to her apartments and threatened her. I did not find Vivian. But I found that Clare Goold's real name was Felise Dobell, agent of the Unknown.

About this time appeared the striped bandit. Wearing a long black-and-white-striped coat, a mask and a high silk crush opera hat, this unique desperado held up people in the most unexpected places—and always returned what he had stolen. His most sensational robbery occurred in a fashionable gambling club, on a night when the club was entertaining Conrad Hearn, the country's most powerful financier. Burgess, a high police official I knew, was also at the club.

I was the striped bandit.

DETERMINED to attract the attention of the Unknown, I chose this as the most sensational way of getting into jail. Of course, I did not go to jail myself. "Snips," a young gamin I had picked up in a dive known as the "Hole," was caught with the striped costume. He went to jail, refused to answer questions and was released with secret instructions from the Unknown to report at a certain place. But, as I had planned, I went in his stead. In a dark room I talked to a voice I seemed vaguely to remember. Questions were asked me. In them I caught hints of a vast scheme to organize criminals to combat the Secret Service as they combatted the police.

Then a light flashed on, and I saw a man clad completely in a black cloak and mask. I also was masked.

"Take off that mask!" thundered the Unknown.

"No!"

He pushed a button, and the room went dark. I shot from both guns. Some one shot back. Silence, and a long, long wait. After many hours came three of his gang to make sure that I was dead. I killed them all and escaped. In a restaurant a detective named Perkins tried to arrest me on suspicion, but I fought him off and got home safe at last.

XI

I MAY appear to have come off very well in the encounters just mentioned, yet, so far as getting anything of value out of them, I had failed miserably. In fact, I had snapped every thread that might have been followed to the man I was after. The man himself had got away, even though I had shot—and he probably did not realize what rare luck that was. Felise Dobell, of course, had fled into obscurity. The assassins, who might possibly have put me on to the track that I was looking for, were silenced. I had little to guide me.

Moreover, the police were desperately searching for a man of my description. One thing that gave me pretty much a sense of security was that the city was filled with slender, long-nosed, comparatively young men, any one of whom—so far as a general description went—might get arrested in my place. Unless an unfortunate meeting put me face to face with one of the officers I had run into, there was not much chance of my being embarrassed by the fact that everybody in the city was looking for me.

So I thought. Then came a note, typewritten, but I had no trouble in recognizing the author.

> How do you like being a crook? Beginning to find out that it takes brains, aren't you? I have an old score to even with you, and I'll even it in my own way. Look out for Dorel. His pretty wife has told him her troubles with you. How do I know it was you? It is my business to know things, my dear Everhard, —— you!

Something chilly went up and down my back-bone as I read.

Jerry, and no one else, knew that I was the striped bandit. Jerry would not have told. Yang may have suspected—but he would have told nothing. Yet Gaboreau had guessed with that uncanny accuracy of his that left nothing to mere chance.

I set myself down for an hour, determined not to get out of the chair until I had figured out just how Gaboreau had guessed my identity. At first all ideas were blurred, but presently I realized. It was simple—as most incomprehensible things are simple when one stumbles onto the obvious. Or at least I thought so.

I was convinced that Gaboreau was in some way associated with the Unknown, and knew that a meeting had been arranged between the Unknown and the striped bandit. I had escaped without being identified, except as Perkins identified me as the man who had trapped him at Gaboreau's house; and Gaboreau knew that man was I. Also the deduction was clinched by the knowledge that few men could with three shots kill as many men. One of those most likely to do that was myself.

That Gaboreau knew of my experiences with Felise Dobell, whom he called Dorel's wife, seemed to indicate that he was on the inside of the crime clique.

I felt that I was in a serious situation. Yet I was in the position of not daring to run—even if I had been disposed to go into hiding. Excepting for what doubtful value Henry Macree might be to me, my only chance now of getting in touch with any of those people seemed to be to wait until they in their own time and way got in touch with me.

At that moment I was not cheerful. If it had been discovered who I was, it had also, no doubt, been discovered who Vivian was. Gaboreau could identify her at a glance. The only thing that I could do was to promise myself that many people would regret it when they tried to "get" me, as I was sure that they would try. I put in two days studying and following vain clues; then I determined to try meeting Macree.

Macree was the nephew of Conrad Hearn. I would look up Hearn. So the cycle of complications ran. I got in touch with Burgess, who seemed to have become rather intimate with the banker, and suggested a dinner for the three of us.

"Sorry," said Burgess over the telephone. "Hearn's had an accident—automobile smash-up. Nothin' in the papers—smash the market. He's asked about you, too. Interested. But we can have dinner. Need the rest—I do. All knocked to the devil, I am. Hell's been poppin'. I'll tell you about it."

I went to dinner with Burgess, and I left Yang Li with stern instructions not to let Snips out of the door. I told Snips likewise that he should not budge. But Snips very much objected to any such arrangement. He wanted—I knew it was what he wanted—to get among his friends and strut. He had become a prominent figure in crime and wanted all the glory and garlands.

Burgess was a sobered, almost pitiful man. Politically, forces were being shaped against him. The department was in disgrace with the public. He was baffled and worried. But he did not complain. He did not whine. He swore freely and talked much. He seemed to think that he could trust me; seemed to take it for granted that I was, if not actually connected with the Federal service, at least in close touch with it. He knew Gowan MacFarland had been a relative and close friend of mine. That fact had probably strengthened the idea, if not put it into his head.

"The city, the country, little suspects," he said, "the volcano it's livin' on. The war—that's bad. But this—it's goin' to be worse than war. Anarchy!"

Burgess was not excitable in the way that most men are. He might grow agitated, but he was never panic-stricken. And he never posed.

Two score of the most prominent men, financiers chiefly, in the city had during the past few weeks received warnings that they were to be killed, assassinated. It was not blackmail; it was simply a cold-blooded warning. Some of those were in war work, but it did not appear to have German agents back of it.

He did not know how many more had received a similar warning and had had strength of mind enough to throw it aside as the usual lunatic threat and not trouble the police. But many of these men of importance had demanded that the police apprehend the maker of those threats—and Burgess admitted that he was helpless.

"Then Conrad Hearn—" he said significantly.

"I thought it was an auto?"

"Auto be ——! That was for his friends, business associates—nothin' at all in the papers. Thank God. You know how some of these moguls are. Prefer silence. Hearn's in a bad way. It seems he was shot——"

"Shot!"

"Yes. In his own bed. And by the striped bandit!"

I SLOWLY took a very deep breath.

"I talked with Macree. Saw Hearn, but he was too weak to talk—said so, anyway. Macree says his uncle had gone to bed as usual, but some time after midnight he cried out——"

"What midnight?" I asked.

"Of the same day that little gutter-snipe of a Snips had been released. Three days ago, wasn't it? Time is all muddled in my head. Snips is no more the striped bandit than I am. Can't make the fools at headquarters believe it. But you know it."

"I know it?" I inquired with inflections that denied all knowledge of anything connected with Snips.

"Sure you do. You know him. And you know that no little gutter-rat is capable of being the striped bandit. Besides, Ishman told me he wasn't."

"Ishman!"

"Yes. Believe me, I raked that shyster over the coals. I told him, by ——, that I didn't need evidence to get him, and get him I would if he didn't give me the right dope. I was mad, Everhard, —— me; I just wanted to hit somebody!"

"You hit him?"

"Hit him? No; I just kicked him all over his —— office an' dared him to make out a complaint. I said the next crook he got bail for, I'd slap him in jail — an' all his friends 'd wonder where he was. 'Russia,' he says. Russia is right, I told him. Bolsheviki—that's me in dealin' with shyster lawyers after this."

"Joining forces with the district attorney, I see."

"I'd join forces with the devil himself, Everhard. An', if I ever get my fingers on Snips again, believe me, Everhard, I'll split his tongue like a magpie's to make him talk. Third degree! I'll give him thirty! He knows something. I don't know what, but something. I want it.

"Congressmen being potted. Gardner—big man, that Gardner—getting shot at. Now Conrad Hearn."

"Gardner is a reform millionaire Socialist, isn't he?"

"I know. That's what's got me up a tree. Anarchists, I says to myself. Nothin' else to explain it. But why Gardner, then? Now, I can understand why anarchists might want to get Conrad Hearn. But Gardner—and—" he lowered his voice confidentially—"last night they tried to get——"

He whispered the name of a great steel millionaire who had been doing tremendous war work; not only war work, but who had openly declared that the day of the millionaire was gone, that the country—government owning railroads and telegraph and all—was socialistic, and that he for one was glad to see it.

"Germans," I said, honestly believing it.

"Germans, ——! Not a sign of it. Your people at Washington have every German tabbed and spotted. They say this Unknown isn't German. Who, then? Anarchists? No. Why would they shoot—or try to—a man who was out against plutocrats? I give it up."

"That fellow that squealed on Gaboreau down in Washington, is he alive yet?"

"Alive? What do you mean, alive? Of course he is."

"Then Gaboreau is losing his grip. He's killed more than one witness that the police wanted to protect."

"Gaboreau, ——! This is something real, Everhard."

"So's Gaboreau."

"I know. Everybody has his hobbies. This striped bandit's gettin' to be mine. I've seen him!"

"But he hasn't shot anybody—before. Why would he?"

"How do I know? I don't. Conrad Hearn—he's shot. Now all the other millionaires are scared to death. Of course, they have heard—in spite of the secrecy. Each that got a warnin' thinks that he is next. And, you can believe me, they are makin' my life ——! Each has a swarm o' private detectives but wants the whole police department too. It's a mess, —— 'em!"

"And who can possibly be behind it all?"

"Who? The man that's been behind all the deviltry for the past year—or nearly a year. The Unknown—the devil himself. But Ishman is off his staff! You can just bet he is! I told him, if he yanked another crook out o' jail, he'd take his place. 'Law,' he says. 'Law be ——,' I told him. I'm after order. Funny thing, though. When it was understood between us, he says: 'To tell the honest truth, Burgess, I'm mighty glad we've had this little conference. I don't like that work any better than you.' And he told me a long story about how he didn't know who had been employing him. Think o' that."

Burgess repeated pretty much of what Ishman had told him, going back so far as to relate how he had tried to track the source of the Unknown and what had happened in respect to Gowan MacFarland—telling him also of how the striped bandit had seized valuable papers.

Ishman declared his business was ruined but that he was ready to quit. He was done.

"'You just bet you're done!' I told him. "But, on the dead, Everhard, the man did act glad. Of course, he might have made trouble for me—but I was just lookin' for trouble!"

Burgess pounded a fat fist on the table and puffed heartily. His eyes were bright and in earnest. There was a fighting spirit in him. I began to feel a real affection for the man.

"You haven't an idea as to the Unknown?"

"Not the shadow of one," he declared.

"It doesn't seem to be money the fellow is after?"

"Money, no. Not blackmail at all. And, when money isn't a motive for crime, what is?"

"Revenge."

"Certainly. And who has a grudge against millionaires in general. Can't possibly be anything personal when so many are threatened. Anarchists—but it ain't them. That's what's the matter. No motive—anyplace."

"The congressmen and senators that tried to put over the Federalization of the police—is it the same gang?"

"Fool idea that. Federalize the police!"

"But crooks don't think they would like it," I insisted.

"Maybe they wouldn't."

"Maybe it is a big gang of crooks."

"More pipe-dreams of reporters and such. Crooks don't have big gangs."

"But there's something big behind this one. It wasn't the rich congressmen who were killed. It was those who wanted to make new police laws."

"That don't mean the same people are after our little millionaires."

"The methods are the same. The brainwork is identical."

"I'll go bug-house if this keeps up, Everhard. I want something I can stick my teeth into. I'd like to choke somebody to death!"

The fat stubby fingers closed tight as if squeezing a mortal enemy lifeless.

Perhaps I ought to have confided with

Burgess. But I didn't. It would have complicated matters. I doubted my ability to convince him that I had been honest all the way through. I would help him if I could. But trust him? No. He would have thrown me into jail in a minute to have strengthened his own reputation and standing. He had a courage that I admired—but he was ambitious—I thought him a politician first. I would have been, I thought, nothing but a stepping-stone. I object to being a stepping-stone.

I wanted to edge the name of Henry Macree into the conversation again and find out as much as possible about that young man's movements.

I began by mentioning Felise Dobell.

I thought Burgess would jump out of his chair.

"How did you learn that name?" he flung at me.

I saw at once that, since the Secret Service had seen fit to withhold from him the fact that it had confided with me after McFarland's death, there was no reason for my explaining. Besides, I did not like the determined, peremptorial way in which he spoke. He could not treat me as he had treated Ishman.

I said nothing. We glared at each other. It was really a glare.

"How did you learn it?" he repeated.

"Use your head," I said slowly, coldly.

It is better to let people make their own deductions. They are more readily convinced when they think of things for themselves than when somebody suggests explanations.

"Oh—I understand," he said, settling back into his puffy self.

Since he had insisted on believing that I was associated with the Federal service, it was just as well to let him be reassured by his own imagination on that point.

We talked freely of Felise Dobell. I mentioned Dorel. Burgess looked blank. I mentioned a few of Dorel's aliases, and Burgess was animated at once.

"Lost sight of that fellow—think he's jumped the country. He was bad."

"Still is—I fancy. And not far away."

"Dorel? That his real name? We'll spread a dragnet for him."

"Better catch every adult male in the city then. Dorel is one of the few men in this world who can wear a disguise in the daylight and get by with it. Used to be an actor, I believe. Has make-up down pat."

"Oh, well," said Burgess contentedly, "he can't shave off his ears."

"But he can sear his fingers."

"We get him, we'll identify him."

"And when you catch him, his wife—Felise Dobell—probably won't be far away."

"His wife! —— it, why didn't you fellows tell me that a long time ago. That's a clue. You Secret Service men are stupid at times."

"I have never told you I was a Secret Service man."

"Oh, well—think I need a primer?"

We continued to talk. There was much to talk about. Then the telephone called Burgess. He did not stir out those days without leaving word where he could be located.

He came back, excited.

Snips had been found—dead.

"Where?" I demanded, every nerve drawn, and the icy fury that comes when I am in tight quarters again filling me.

"On the street—two blocks from the Hole. Knifed! Don't know who done it."

SO IT was that matters went from bad to worse for me. Of course, I felt responsible for Snips's death. It was useless for me to explain to myself that it was his own fault. I never knew exactly how he got out of the apartment, for Yang was as vigilant as mortal eyes can be. But I fancied that Snips, eager to get back to his friends and claim the tribute due him as a hero, had slipped out when the Chinaman thought him asleep. Besides, Yang did not expect him to try to get away. Snips had promised to be "good."

Some one, wise in the psychology of crooks, had evidently expected him to return to his haunts and had waited near the Hole. The stabbing had been done in full light of noon before the eyes of a score of people, but no one was caught, and descriptions of no value were obtained.

Snips had no father, no mother. He had a sister. She cared nothing for him, Connolly said, but shed large and fluent tears inconsolably when Connolly placed a purse in her hands. That night she was riotously drunk.

I had tried for two days to think of some way to approach Henry Macree. He was easily found, easily seen. But I knew that, if I tried to follow him, tried to speak with him, there was more chance that Felise Dobell would get on my tracks than that I would get on hers. That is, if I met him publicly.

I did a fairly ingenious thing. I fished "Deaf Anne" from the Hole. I had her rigged out like a fairly respectable aunt from some provincial city and put her in charge of a friend of mine and let him show her "the sights."

This friend was a young fellow of no importance, who was glad enough to do me a favor—providing I paid well for it. He was told that the "aunt" was eccentric and to follow her about as she pleased.

Anne was an expert lip-reader. She had been deaf all of her life, but deafness had not interfered much with her success as a crook. Shoplifters do not need to hear well. She camped on Macree's trail as much as one could by visiting the places where he was likely to be found. She did not see a great deal of him, but she saw pretty much what was said to him and what he said when he appeared.

Moreover, she liked the work. Alas, she liked the brimming glass, too. My friend had some difficulty with my eccentric aunt. He understood, he said, why I entertained her by proxy. He was sure, also, that she had fallen in love with Henry Macree. She couldn't keep her eyes off that fellow.

Anne was so expert that the friend never suspected her of being totally deaf. A little hard of hearing was as near as he got to it. He found that one had to touch her arm to attract attention if she happened to be looking elsewhere. Perhaps that was absent-mindedness. He wasn't sure.

A week went by, and nothing of extreme importance happened. That is, happened to me. I was in a state of expectancy almost every second of that week. Apprehensively alert, I went out the same as ever. But, if a man brushed against me in the crowd, he went his way without ever being aware of how near he had been to getting shot. It wasn't a case of nerves. I merely realized that, if the attempt was made to knife me, it would be made by some one who pretended to stumble or be shoved against me. No one did. I could scarcely understand the inattention from the relentless Unknown. Certainly he would want vengeance, and certainly Gaboreau knew who I was.

A thing that puzzled me much was that the man who had mentioned Gaboreau and been thrown into prison at Washington continued to live. Gaboreau certainly must have lost his cunning, his grip. Yet it did not seem so.

I heard that the firm of Waller, Waller & Ishman was being disbanded. Ishman was retiring, it was said. No doubt the man felt that he was sitting on a lighted powder keg. He was between the Unknown, Burgess and the striped bandit—each of whom exerted, or had it in his power to exert, uncomfortable pressure.

I had written Conrad Hearn a little note—the usual kind of note, expressing sympathy for his indisposition and hope of a speedy recovery, and that sort of thing. I did not want to lose connection with him.

I got a very friendly, personal reply asking me to call on Friday evening. He was better. He would be glad to see me. He wanted to see me. Wouldn't I come?

I answered on Wednesday that I would.

Deaf Anne reported to me from time to time by telephone. It was an inconvenient arrangement but better than meeting me. My friend thought it queer, but he was a simple, unsuspicious fellow and perhaps admired the ingenuity with which I kept such a queer aunt at a distance. He would call me up, then step out of the booth and let her have the receiver. He thought that one of her eccentricities—to make him call me up.

Piece by piece I got information that helped some. During the week I learned through curious eavesdropping that Macree repeatedly met a veiled woman. But she lifted her veil to her nose when she talked, sometimes higher. This woman seemed perpetually frightened and watched the crowds. She and Macree seemed to be quarreling—in a polite way—over an affair of the heart.

"That woman"— "she"—"what is the matter, Henry?" were frequently on her lips.

I surmised that the veiled lady was Felise Dobell taking precautions against encountering me. She seemed to be complaining with Macree because he did not love her as he had once seemed to. Another woman was involved—earrings mentioned—Vivian!

XII

Macree was in love with Vivian. Certainly I wanted to get in close touch with that fellow. Indeed I did.

But I knew that youngster had not kidnaped Vivian. No. She had been kidnaped by mistake for Felise. I could not imagine how or why. I could less imagine how Vivian had found opportunity to slip that personal warning to MacFarland—a warning that did no good. Or why she had failed to communicate with me.

A rather severe pang came to suggest that perhaps Vivian had tired of me at last—was definitely through with me. In all honesty, I could understand why she might be fascinated by Henry Macree. He was young, boyish, exuberant, a great social figure—or could be. Hearn's household—a limited one—did not seem to go in much for social affairs.

But this queer rivalry between Vivian and Felise, the oddness of Vivian's refusing to reveal her identity, the close connection with the terrible criminal—all that baffled me.

ANNE, with that sure instinct that women seem to have for finding out things about other women, one day left my friend, her escort, waiting at the table and managed to follow Felise Dobell.

She saw her meet a tall, well-built, heavy, distinguished man who wore a full beard, black and neatly trimmed. Very well trimmed around the lips. He might have been astonished had he known that the barber contributed something to his embarrassment by so neatly trimming the beard around the mouth.

They spoke together for not more than thirty seconds. What the woman said, Anne could not see. The important thing that the man had said was:

"Tonight at ten-thirty. Klemscott, No. 6? I'll be there. Ten-thirty. Yes."

They had passed on. It was like a casual greeting on the street.

Anne telephoned me around six on Thursday evening. I, too, decided to be there—wherever it was. Klemscott is a word so difficult to lip-read that even an expert of Anne's adeptness was nearly baffled. But, whether she really caught the name or merely guessed it, she was correct.

I was there. The Klemscott was one of those apartment houses where mail-boxes and push-buttons for the respective apartments are in the vestibule before the street door, which is always locked. There were no speaking-tubes. One pressed a button—if one did not have a key, which was issued only to tenants—and, if the inmate of the apartment was at home or cared for visitors, the inmate pulled a small lever which automatically opened the street door. Then the visitor went inside and found the apartment. A rather complicated arrangement, but common enough in cities where architects have lost many a night's rest devising ways of making apartment houses convenient and suitable to the cliff-dwellers of our time.

I had no way of knowing what I was getting into. It might be a little friendly party with which I could not possibly have any relation. It might be that the woman whom I suspected of being Felise Dobell was not Miss Dobell at all. It might be that Anne had misunderstood—that decrepit old sinner was not the surest person in the world in whom one could put trust—and that I would be letting myself into disagreeable complications.

On the other hand, I was convinced that the woman had been Felise Dobell. I was willing to let myself into almost any kind of complications to get in touch with her again.

One of the defects in my methods is that I am not an adept at diplomacy. In poker terms, I get pretty deep into the pot before I am sure of the cards. But there is something to be said of my rashness, too. I act on the theory that I know what I am about and that half-way measures will not do. In the long run it is no harder, if as hard, to get out of complications brought about by mistaken calculations than it is to get out of a predicament in which one has guessed aright who the enemy would be but underestimated the amount of quickness and force needed to deal with that enemy.

I seldom make the mistake of underestimating anybody's dangerous qualities.

I reached the Klemscott about ten o'clock. I thought it best that I arrive a bit early.

I pressed the button of Apartment 15 and waited. No answer. I pressed the button of Apartment 14. No answer. I pressed the button of Apartment 12. It really wasn't superstition that kept me from trying Apartment 13—at least it wasn't mine. Those who had built the house had seen fit to omit an Apartment 13.

I waited. Presently there was a click, and the door opened—or rather unlocked—so that I could push it open. I snatched a hasty glance at the name on the letter-box of Apartment No. 12 and went in and up the dimly lighted stairs to a door where a young, rather fluffy woman in a kimono waited.

I was all eagerness, or appeared to be.

Then, as I came closer, I looked a bit puzzled, surprized.

"Mrs. Gartland?" I asked.

"I am Mrs. Gartland."

"Mrs. Fred. Gartland?"

"I am Mrs. Fred Gartland."

"Is Fre—Mr. Gartland in?"

Just what I would have said or done if Mr. Fred Gartland had been in, I do not know. Of course, I would have tried to do something plausible. Probably much the same as I did with his wife. But I figured that "Mr." Fred Gartland would not be in—since the name on the letter-box was "Mrs."

"No," she said, smiling rather cynically as if she had no regrets about it. "Mr. Fred Gartland is dead."

I immediately looked shocked.

"He has been dead for six months."

I thought it dreadful. In a way it was, for she was not unsuspicious of me.

There is always one way out of a difficulty of that kind. I took it.

Briefly, I told her I was from San Francisco; that, when I had left, a friend of mine asked me to repay Mr. Gartland a small sum of money loaned years before; that my friend had reformed—his conscience particularly troubled him over that hundred dollars Mr. Gartland had given him.

"That's funny," she said. "I never knew Fred Gartland to loan anybody anything. Won't you come in?"

But she took the money. It was her widow's right. But I really couldn't come in. I was in haste to get away before she began to ask any curious questions as to how I happened to find her. Maybe she had lived in that apartment for years, maybe only for days. I did not know. I didn't care to have her bring up any disagreeable references to the matter. So I resisted her generous invitation, repeated, to come in and have a glass of beer. I gave her some bogus name as my own. She seemed to want it. I gave her an equally bogus address at a real enough hotel. She gave me her telephone number. Of course, I would call her up. Certainly. Oh, yes. Tomorrow. I was meeting friends soon—after-theater party.

At last I got away. She was one of those hard-hearted, sticky-fleshed women. I fancied poor Fred had died with a sense of relief. Anyway, the money was good spendable money, and she was undisguisedly glad to get it. And I—I never object to paying well for anything that I want.

I went down-stairs and closed the door—that is, I opened and closed it from the inside. I had succeeded in getting myself safely within the guarded portals of the Klemscott. Of course, I had improvised the rôle I had played with Mrs. Gartland. I had gone in with the idea of playing that I had mistaken her for some other Mrs. Fred Gartland. But Fred's death had somewhat simplified matters. Widows are always glad to have unsuspected debts paid by the late husband's friends.

I then turned my attention to Apartment 6. It was on the ground floor. On tiptoe I went to it. Light showed through at the sill. I listened. No sound. I tried the door. It was locked. The house was still and, for all the presence of life, might have been empty, deserted.

Swiftly I stripped the lining from my coat, turned it. Then, sticking the felt hat into my hip pocket, I put on the tall, collapsible opera hat, slipped the heavy ring on my finger and adjusted the silk mask.

Then I knocked softly. A pause. The tread of some one—a woman—coming across the floor.

The door opened.

I thrust the gun forward with a silencing—

"Shh-hh-h—not a word!"

Then I saw who it was. I was far more startled and shaken than she—slender, dark, beautiful, with something strangely new and tense in her face—who gave a shudder of surprize and then stepped back, saying quietly—

"Won't you come in?"

I came in. She closed the door quietly behind me. I did not watch her. She could have escaped and filled the silent halls with alarm. I was impenetrably masked, or else for at least once my face might have revealed something of what I felt, for I was alone and face to face with Vivian.

XIII

I HAVE been called cold-blooded. I must be, since I have loved but one woman—but one thing—in a life that has had no restraints except those I have imposed upon it, no morals except those that were inherently agreeable.

I had no claim on Vivian. She was divorced. I respected the divorce, though not for a moment had I ever thought that it meant she would permanently discard me. But it seemed that she had. My amazement at finding her was even less than my amazement at finding her not a prisoner but free. She could have gone out much more easily than I came in. No matter how she had come to disappear, she had remained—or at least now remained—of her own free will.

For circumstantial evidence I haven't a great deal of respect—when it puts me in a wrong attitude, anyway. But it seemed that Vivian—Vivian of all people—was leagued with a gang of crooks. She had no more criminal instinct than a canary. It was incomprehensible. Yet I did not intend to drop my mask and question her. I was thankful for one thing only. That was the mask and the disguise that not even a wife could penetrate.

She was nervous. I could see that, though to one who knew her less well than I it might not have been apparent. She was nervous, but she was not alarmed.

She said quietly:

"There is no money here. No jewelry. Nothing of value. It's a furnished apartment rented for a week. Help yourself to anything you wish." Then she added quickly, "But why have you come?"

I slowly looked about me and shook my head. The manner of asking the question puzzled me, but I could wait to find out why.

"The name—Miss Williams—on the letter-box?" I asked in the thick-tongued manner of the striped bandit.

"That means nothing. The apartment isn't mine. It was taken by another woman. Please sit down. I would like for you to stay. In fact, I am glad to see you. I have just heard something about you—not ten minutes ago."

Perhaps I did blink a little behind my mask. Perhaps I did touch my ears to make sure that it was through them that I was hearing, and it may be I pinched them, too.

Could it be that with ineffable penetration she had looked straight through the mask and knew to whom she was talking? No. That could not be.

"Glad to see me? Heard about me? What?" I asked.

"You are a gentleman—I have been telephoning frantically to get in touch with one."

I could not imagine this delicately poised woman being frantic. True, I had often seen Vivian frantic—over trifles.

"Telephoning to get in touch with me?" I asked densely.

She laughed a little, smiled rather wearily and said:

"No. You see, I really didn't know your number, or I might have called you up. I was that desperate. Some people are coming soon—and I, I don't want to meet them—alone. I was about to run away."

There was something pathetically frank in her manner, a kind of weariness, as if she were resignedly playing an inevitably losing game.

"Would you object to explaining?" I asked.

"Would you object," she said, not questioning but answering, "to taking off your mask?"

"Yes."

"So would I—to taking off my mask. I know more about you than you think. Yes. Please don't become alarmed. I don't know who you are, but I know—I won't say it that way. I know you are a gentleman—and that one who isn't a gentleman is in deadly fear of you. It's a haggled word—gentleman—to express any sort of a compliment. I'll put it this way: you are the sort of man a strange woman can trust."

"Particularly when there is no one else."

"At present, yes. But tell me: when you raided the Phœnix, did you find a tall man there, a tall man with a kind of long nose, who wasn't nervous?"

"That is rather vague," I said, though it wasn't vague at all. "What was his name? You know I took the names and addresses of every one?"

"Richmond," she said quickly, eagerly.

"You mean that professional gambler and card-shark?"

"I don't mean anything of the kind!" Vivian might be in trouble, but her spirit wasn't broken. "He's a friend of mine—or was. I tried to telephone him tonight. What address did he give you?"

"Really, I could hardly be expected to remember that—now."

"I tried to reach him tonight." Then determinedly but as if to herself, "I certainly shall tomorrow!"

It is conveying it very inadequately to say that I was delighted. I feel as a man must feel when the warm blood begins pounding down into his frozen legs.

"But I thought your need was for tonight? Your need of a—a friend?"

"It will probably be as great tomorrow."

"What in particular do you fear tonight? Since I am to take a chaperon's part in your troubles, it would not be inadvisable to tell me."

Any one who thinks it is not both difficult and ridiculous to talk formally with the tongue pressed against the lower teeth needs only to try it alone—let alone before some one whom he is eager to talk with.

"I am asking," she said, "for a chaperon, not a confidant—though I want that, too. You came as a surprize; I have asked that you remain as a favor. For some weeks now you have been in the papers, and not a victim has complained of your manner. You have courage, which is common enough among men—if one only knows what men to select. I am in an unpleasant situation. A few minutes ago some one—a man—telephoned, and he mistook me for the person who has this apartment. He said among other things that he would be unavoidably detained—he didn't know how long. I am very much disturbed by what he said. I am trying to be calm—you notice that? But I am a very frightened woman, and I feel awfully helpless!"

Vivian was holding herself in. It was easily seen; anyway, it was very easy for me to see it. She was nervously tense. Her dark eyes were bright; her red, mobile lips drawn. She spoke with no trembling in her voice, however. Her voice was always clear, metallic as chimes. She leaned forward a little and nervously pushed an imaginary whip of hair from her eyes and, crossing her ankles, nervously tapped the leg of a chair with her toe.

"What has happened to frighten you? You can tell that much."

"Yes. I have misjudged people. Now I have delusions—all in fragments. This is a wicked world. Such a world as makes me feel respect for honest highwaymen. Your mask shouts for all to hear: 'I am a robber. Look to your purse!' I hate men—'honest' men! I hate all men—except gamblers and, of course, highwaymen. As long as they keep their masks on. I know a man whose face was always a mask. I grew awfully tired of it—but he at least never broke any illusions. Will you help me?"

"Certainly—unless, Delilah-like, you try to give me into the hands of the cops!"

She laughed slightly. Vivian was irrepressible, even when in distress.

"I wanted to run. I was ready to run when you came. He had just telephoned. But now—would you really use that gun?"

"I might be persuaded to. It would largely depend on the persuasive attitude of the other party—the one I was to use it on."

"With your mask you are like a priest hidden by the curtain at confessional. I used to be in a convent. Besides, a woman in trouble must talk. You won't ask questions?"

I asured her that I would not.

"I DIDN'T stay long—in the convent. And outside I found a man. I found lots of men. But one man—I will underscore that: the man. I didn't want to marry him. But that didn't make any difference to him. He made me want to marry him. He just put a sign on me, 'Keep away.' It wasn't really a sign, you understand. But other men respected it. This man had the mask face—and you could look at it and imagine anything you wanted to imagine, except that he was harmless.

"That's why other men remained away. They knew he was dangerous. And women love dangerous men. They can't help it. I married him. And he was always the same—so calm, so unemotional, so unshakable. I wanted to scream. Sometimes I did. I couldn't stand it any longer.

Lots of times I couldn't stand it any longer. He wouldn't even take the trouble to make me jealous! I left him. I left him many times—then I left him really."

She stopped, hesitating perhaps whether to go on or how to go on. It wasn't so pleasant as one might think to have a former wife's confession delivered—for all she knew—into the ears of a strange ruffian. But Vivian was heedless and reckless and erratic. Give a woman beauty—or, rather, beauty and a consciousness of it—and a certain urging unrest that drives her—it makes no difference where, but simply drives her as furies lash souls—and she will get into trouble and pull a straggling line of men, some eager, some alarmed, after her.

Unfortunately—it is unfortunate for any woman, particularly so for one of Vivian's type—she knew herself fascinating and, for some men, irresistible. Wayward and he d-less she was; delicate but not fragile. There was nothing of the clinging vine about her, something of the predatory hawk born by mischance into the plumage of the bird of paradise. As much of an actress as clever women are always; eager for excitement; thrilled by having a dozen men at her feet—and caring not at all how many of them perished there.

She was not heartless—no more than a glare of light is heartless when it burns out the eyes of those who stare into it. She would stop on a slushy day to cuddle in her furs a crying street baby; she was generous and tender to a gullible degree and unconscionably indifferent to being victimized by any one who appealed to her sympathies. But with men—they were toys, foolish, queer toys. She jangled their passions and made counters of their hearts with the glee of a child banging on a lyre that might sound the harmony of the spheres and stringing stars on a thread. With the imperative whim of her sex she would send a stranger scurrying for her taxi or, in an emergency, enlist a masked bandit as a chaperon.

"I shan't mention names, and please don't ask questions," she said and waited to see if I agreed.

I nodded.

Then she told me a part of her story. Much of it I understood at the time; some of it I filled in afterward. And all of it I know better than any one else could ever possibly know, because I knew Vivian herself so well.

I had surmised that she had been kidnaped. I submit that no other conjecture was reasonable under the circumstances as I imagined them. Felise Dobell had also strengthened that theory, but Miss Dobell had a woman's reason for not admitting that Vivian was in any sense her rival.

It began with a not unnatural mistake in identity. The whereabouts of Felise Dobell were for a time unknown by those who had most reason for wishing to get in touch with her; and every one of a certain gang that knew her, or thought that they knew her, was asked to keep a sharp lookout for her.

Whoever has waited at a corner for some one to be recognized by description realizes how many people there are in this world pretty much alike. So Vivian was approached by a young man of fair appearance and good manner, who said—

"Would you object to meeting the king's brother?" She hesitated only long enough to make sure that the man was not crazy. The average woman would have ignored the cryptic password, but she, curiously indifferent to conventions, to dangers, and utterly unrepressed by other follies that heedlessness had plunged her into, eagerly accepted the invitation.

In about two minutes she realized that here was a mistake in identity—which added only to her zest. She thought it "good fun."

She was taken to a house and there, by the over-eager secretary who knew Miss Dobell only through one fleeting glimpse in the twilight, shown certain reports that it was important she, Miss Dobell, should at once be familiar with.

Vivian read them with avidity and repressed her horror. She had stumbled on to terrible secrets, repented her rashness and thought of escape. But that was impossible.

Word had been sent out that Miss Dobell was found. A tall, fine-looking, poised man with a black beard, who gave his name as Mr. Lerod, came hurriedly.

"Get out!" he said to the secretarial marplot, and he was alone with Vivian.

"Who are you?" he asked ominously but not without appreciating that before him was a radiant, flaming woman.

She told him frankly how she came to be

there; but her name she would not give.

"You realize," he said severely but not without an undertone of sympathy—the sort of sympathy that some men always have for the pretty woman—"that you have discovered such things as make it necessary to prevent giving you the chance to talk?"

"I realize," she said defiantly, "that you are a devil!"

He laughed, but quietly, pleasantly, not at all like a devil.

"I," he said easily, "am a detective. What you have read is evidence very laboriously gathered. But we can't strike yet. I have no way of telling that you are not an agent of these people." He tapped the papers she had read. "Miss Dobell is my assistant. Something has happened to her. I don't know what. That fool blundered, and you took advantage of it. The one thing you can do is to help me. And, of course, I must know who you are—be sure of you."

VIVIAN stubbornly but artfully—that is, with something of coquetry—refused to tell her name. She felt—as more women, and men, too, than the world imagines feel—that she could do almost anything and be untouched, unimplicated, so long as her name was not known. It is not merely regard for reputation that inspires this idiosyncrasy; the absence of a recognized identity gives one a sense of detachment from one's self, makes one impersonal, free. Among a crowd of utter strangers in a carnival one wears a mask not to guard the reputation but to gain the sense of detachment from the sobersides that is one's self.

That was not entirely why Vivian refused to tell her name, but that psychological factor had its influence. What she most appreciably felt was that without an identity she would not be personally responsible for anything she might do—as well as something of a mystery to those around her. Women lie in the twilight between waking and sleep dreaming of how they can seem mysterious.

Vivian was no judge of men, of human nature. It did not seem curious to her that Mr. Lerod accepted her as a confidante when he did not know who she was. She only knew that he was inclined to fall in love with her. Also that he was handsome, striking.

I could reconstruct Lerod's reasoning better than she. He knew accident—not design or collusion—had brought her stumbling into his secrets. Therefore she was harmless as long as she was not permitted to be disillusioned. There was no need to keep her as a prisoner, or at least to let her know that she was a prisoner, as long as she could be kept interested in the work. Besides, she was pretty, tantalizingly evasive, spirited, seductive. That was his reasoning, supported by the sinister knowledge that, when she ceased to interest him or became dangerous, her throat could be cut.

But he reckoned on women in general, not Vivian in particular, in thinking that she might soon have her charm wear off or become commonplace. Vivian was not fashioned from clay but carved in an inspirational moment by the Creator from flawless opal. Unfortunately in an unguarded moment some imp had slipped up and breathed life into her.

Mr. Lerod, with the quick ingenuity of the clever crook, had reassured her and saved his own reputation in her eyes by posing as a detective, a man devoted to hounding down the rogues he guided. She was easily deceived. She always was. Woman-like, she might grow radically suspicious over something commonplace and obvious. But impose a lie on her and she seemed automatically disarmed—unless some glaring contradiction aroused her fancy, and then she became implacably untrusting.

Inside of a very few days Mr. Lerod was madly in love with her. Somehow or other she touched him not on his honor but on his pride. She really thought him a gentleman. Perhaps she was the only woman he knew who did. He played the rôle for her. It probably gave him satisfaction to have her think him a gentleman. Besides, he had nothing to lose. He could be the villain at any time and cease to treat her with respect and consideration.

I believe that I have not shown a sentimental regard for glossing Vivian's reputation. I have not tried to conventionalize her into the approval, for instance, of women like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion—and without fire. I have written her down as she was. I would not even insist that she was not wicked, because I care little, if anything at all, for what is generally thought to be wickedness.

I loved Vivian. It was not a case of loving her more if she had been different from what she was—that is, like some one else. Her greatest weakness was a certain childish eagerness to be pleased, and pleasure for her was excitement. In her excitement she lost her power of being incredulous or of being analytically suspicious.

It takes a guilty conscience or ulterior motives to inspire suspicions. Vivian had neither. In this case, because Lerod, polished, better mannered than most men of instinctive honor could ever be—most clever rogues usually are polished so: they have to be if they are to maintain their clever roguery—seemed to have set himself to make her think he was a very fine gentleman. And, such is the tribute that I must give him, he went about it pretty much as a very fine gentleman would have done. He was crude in places—of course. But, on the whole, much less crude than one could reasonably expect.

Vivian had no way of knowing that the little apartment house was the ménage of Lerod's crooks—was given entirely over to his gang, filled and honeycombed with his agents, not all of whom were even aware that those next door were in the gang, too. This arrangement tended to keep every one circumspect and quiet and enabled Lerod to watch every move made by them, to scrutinize almost every word spoken—at least over the telephone.

Stenographic listeners took down from the switchboard connection every word that was said and left typed reports for the alert perusal of Lerod. Spies had poor chance of getting into his confidence or of working if they did succeed in getting there. This well-nigh omnipotent supervision may have done much to make him feel unafraid of Vivian.

She had an apartment to herself with a middle-aged, phlegmatic servant, who talked little but noticed everything. Mrs. Hudson could not have been more loyal to Lerod if she had been his mother. Who she was is unknown; though certainly something more than gang loyalty inspired her devotion to him.

Lerod just reversed himself to charm Vivian. And, except that he personally appeared just the opposite of what he was, he did tell her many of his secrets—for even, it is said, Napoleon boasted before women.

Lerod continually stressed his personal danger, but without showing any apprehension for what might happen. He filled Vivian with apprehension. Women are always expected to be touched by the man's dangers. The blackamoor won the fair lady in Shakespeare by telling what he had been through.

Had he come at her with direct attitudes of love, she would have had her barriers up and flirted across the fence. But he did nothing of the kind. He aroused her sympathy and played on her vanity. It is easy to make women a bit silly by playing those two stops of their nature: but, then, those two will readily make a fool of a man—and there are a dozen other ways, too. Vivian was not uninfluenced. But she was not a bit of ripe fruit to fall into the first hand that touched her. Rather she was a bird that hopped from branch to branch, just eluding the grasp but not flying.

LEROD told her that there were big and powerful interests behind the criminal gang. Remember, he was educated.

"The old robber-barons," he said, "to defend their feudal rights used to gather all the ruffians and cutthroats in the land under their banners. It is like that now. This war in Europe is playing havoc with robber-barons. They are afraid of the reconstruction. Some of them are afraid of one thing only. Socialism. They prefer anarchy—which is chaos. Believe they are strong enough to rule the whirlwind. They like peace. Yes. They make more money when the country is peaceful and the Government lets them alone. But they prefer civil war to socialism. The robber barons used to prefer civil war to acknowledging the authority of the king. It begins to look as if the paper cap would be the crown in America. With organized crooks—you would be surprized how many people are crooks or would be if encouraged—with all of these organized, it would be an easy matter to stir up so much trouble that the Government would be too busy, too harassed, to meddle with big business. That is why these men at Washington who propose to Federalize the police are being killed off—why millionaires who have more or less reconciled themselves to Government interference—socialism—are being assassinated. A wonderful plot, isn't it?

"Incredible? Impossible? Certainly. Robber-barons—that is, some of them—never know when their day is done. The wise ones don't rebel against his Majesty the Proletariat. But crooks are soldiers of fortune. They don't care what wars are fought for so long as they have the right to steal and kill people they don't like. Whether the robber-barons succeed is a matter of indifference to the crooks. They ply their trade, and if their trade happens to be approved and guarded by a powerful robber-baron who furnishes bail and squeezes judges—so much the better for the crooks.

"The man behind the crooks, the field-marshal, or rather the Napoleon, who handles the crooks, is ambitious. He had brains—" Lerod was describing himself—"and, if he can make a catspaw of the robber-barons, he is certainly not going to tell them that they are fools. He may show them so eventually.

"It is amusing to see a robber-baron dabbling with crime! He may be all right in plundering a country or assassinating men by panics, but, when it comes to picking a pocket or cutting a throat, he is a rank amateur. But you can't make a man who has succeeded in piling up money believe that he is more Napoleonic at tiddleywinks—making dollars jump into a cup—or at playing jackstraws with railroads—stealing one from a pile without disturbing the rest—than he is at recruiting and training criminals! Jail is the proper place for a lot of crooks; and most of those that the robber-baron fishes out the other man—the real Napoleon—puts into the morgue.

"Terrible? Yes. Who are these men. The robber-baron and the Napoleon? No one knows—but themselves. If any one knew, my work would be over." Lerod was speaking with cynical accuracy. "The police, the Secret Service, everybody is making desperate efforts to find out.

"Did you ever hear of Antoine Gaboreau?"

Vivian made a quick denial. There was a certain directness about the question, a certain manner that seemed to say, "If you have heard of Gaboreau, I shall question you thoroughly."

But Lerod went on:

"Some people used to think he was the greatest criminal possible. I broke him. Ruined him. He had no genius at all compared to this man—this Napoleon of crooks."

That was the first crack in Lerod's veneer — his remark about Gaboreau. Vivian knew much about Gaboreau. She knew that no detective had ever "broken" or "ruined" him. She saw that Lerod boasted. Besides, mentioning Gaboreau sent her thoughts with beating wings back to times when she suffered sleepless nights through worry over another man's life, evoked remembrance of times when she had stood near that man while his guns spoke to certain dangerous fellows across the room. Lerod was unaware of the psychological slip he made with that vain lie.

THE disappearance of Felise Dobell had been wholly due to an accident on the street—with a truck—that landed her unconscious in the hospital. She pretended to be worse off than she was so as to avoid being questioned. She did not dare try to send word to Lerod for fear that he might be located and questioned, and so several days went by, during which Vivian was drawn into the complications. At last Felise in the dark early morning hours evaded the nurses and fled. But in the meantime Lerod had been alarmed. He knew men are usually betrayed by the women who love them. But that knowledge seldom, if ever, makes men more sensible toward other women whom they want to love them.

But, by the nature of things, Felise Dobell—she had more aliases than a chameleon has hues—was indispensable. No one else could readily take her place. But he tried to keep her at arms' length and so encouraged her to flit from lodging to lodging, frightening her with reports of how close the police were on her trail and winning her gratitude and strengthening her loyalty—which he seemed instinctively to feel needed perpetual strengthening—by pretending time after time that he had just barely saved her—with risk to himself—from being caught.

Vivian went out with Lerod and enjoyed life immensely. It was thrilling. I went out but little and, of course, never met her. All the private detectives in Christendom—

whom I had turned loose—would never think of looking under their noses for anybody they sought. The elusive party must always be found in Timbuktu or Shanghai or up close to the North Pole.

It is not to be imagined that Felise, who at this time went under the name of Clare Goold, took it in good part to have the man she loved so attentive to Vivian; and it must have been even more exasperating to see the other man, Macree, whom she had—for purely pecuniary reasons—set herself to fascinate, growing foolish over the same woman. That is exactly what happened.

One day Lerod in great glee showed Vivian what he claimed were intercepted instructions the gang was sending to a safe-cracker who had been pried out of jail and ordered to Washington to await orders.

Of course, Lerod was going to send the instructions on, just as if he had never seen them, then lay a trap to catch the crooks.

Lerod described this safe-cracker's appearance and mentioned that his real name was Gowan McFarland. How did he know? It was his business to know things. And the morning after this fellow had been arrested, Burgess had sent a wire to a certain person of authority in Washington:

> Gowan McFarland, safe-cracker, arrested here last night. Caught at Friedlander's.

Burgess was a good deal of a fool at times and had taken too literally his instruction to notify that person of authority when Gowan should be arrested. And Lerod would not have been the crook he was if he had not arranged to have access to matters confidential in Burgess' office—and in other offices. Lerod had learned crime and its devious ways under a master of organization.

Even at that, Lerod did not know who Gowan McFarland actually was, but Vivian did. Lerod was puzzled that Burgess should have sent such a telegram to the Federal service, and Vivian—puzzled as to why McFarland should have been a safe-cracker—offered the solution.

"Maybe he's a detective, too," she said.

"No. He was caught in the act. Friedlander's was broken in. Bold job. I investigated."

"That's just it," she exclaimed eagerly. "You say this robber-baron is always getting criminals out of jail and turning them over to Napoleon—trying to make him use them—maybe MacFarland knew that and planned to get caught on purpose!"

"You are a wonder!" Lerod said, remembering the Burgess telegram and to whom it was sent.

"If the gang finds out, will they kill him?" she asked, frightened.

"Kill him!" Lerod laughed ironically. "If that fellow doesn't do on the jump everything he is told to, he will surely wake up dead. I know that gang of cutthroats. He may not be a detective, but he will bear close watching."

Lerod sat meditating on his new suspicions. Vivian, watching him, slipped to her desk and dashed off a panicky note:

> For my sake and Don's be careful! Do anything they tell you to—don't hesitate—no matter how terrible. You have no idea how closely you are watched. Tear this up and burn it and throw the ashes away.

She had scarcely realized what she was writing. For that matter, she scarcely realized what she was doing or why. Gowan had always been a great favorite with her. She knew that I was devoted to him. Thus, unconsciously, she had linked our names in a note of urgent, vague warning.

She asked Lerod if she could see the "intercepted" letter of instructions again, and he rather absent-mindedly gave it to her.

"You are sure that he will get this?"

"Of course."

"Who's Felise Dobell?" she demanded, putting her note into the envelop as she reread the letter telling Gowan to meet Felise Dobell.

The question must have at first startled, then amused Lerod.

"One of the worst of the gang! I've never seen her myself, but I've heard she looks something like Clare Goold. She is to meet the fellow and try him out!"

"Why don't you arrest her?"

"We hope to catch bigger game by having her watched."

"But you—you won't let them harm him—this man?"

"Oh, no," said Lerod. "I'll keep my eyes on him! I'm going to Washington for that very purpose."

"Shall I seal this envelop?" she asked, with subtle eagerness—as if to do something to help in this great war on crime.

One may imagine that there was much cynical pleasure in the smile he gave with his assent.

Vivian never knew why she did not confide in Lerod. But I understand better than she. For one thing, it would have forced her to reveal who she was, and she was not ready to do that—not because she distrusted Lerod, but because she knew that as a woman of "mystery" she enjoyed a distinctiveness that would be irrecoverable once she unmasked. And any one who, though not well known in the city—with me her gaiety had been restricted—went veiled and kept her face as much as possible muffled with furs, insisted on private dining-rooms so as to avoid what chance acquaintances might stumble against her, was not likely to surrender her "mystery" at the time it was most pleasant.

For another thing, she felt Lerod would take pains to assist and watch over McFarland without her needing to tell more. For still another thing, to have confided with him would have brought my name—sooner or later—into the conversation; and Vivian had the curious superstition—or something almost like a superstition—that it was bad luck to discuss me with other men. That no doubt arose from the fact that such men as developed sufficient intimacy with her to discuss my name usually had some more or less disagreeable meeting with me later.

LEROD came back from Washington with a pretty accurate report of what had happened. The gang had kept a close, suspicious watch on McFarland. They had killed on the train a private detective whom some one had engaged to follow him. All might have gone well with McFarland for a time at least if he had not written a letter.

"He foolishly wrote to a friend of mine," said Lerod, "who is high in the Secret Service, telling everything that had happened."

Possibly suggested by the accident to Felise Dobell, the messenger by whom McFarland dispatched the letter had been run down, the letter opened, read, restored, the messenger taken to a hospital, from where he later delivered his fatal paper.

"The fellow that cut McFarland's throat," said Lerod, "was the gang leader himself. Came near getting me, too, they did. I actually had to slide down a silk rope fastened to the window-sill—hooked over, you know—that could be released with a strong flip from the lower end."

And Lerod thought that Vivian's trembling lips and tear-stained eyes were due to nervous hysteria over his escape from the room where he had butchered Gowan McFarland.

Felise, discovering that Lerod was apparently really in love with Vivian, became furiously jealous.

Lerod did not seem to care that Macree was fascinated by Vivian. He may have approved. It may have occurred to him that, when Vivian superseded Felise Dobell, Macree would be none the less—but rather the more—of a victim to his, Lerod's, scheme of things. Vivian, anyway, was very clever at keeping rivals from being jealous. Anyway, as she grew to like Macree very much, she showed the liking not at all except to keep him dangling.

But, as concerned Felise Dobell, Lerod was—oh, well, she loved him. Macree was more or less in the nature of a victim. She might be afraid of Lerod, but that was no reason why she should unresistingly see herself supplanted in his affections.

The young man who had made the original mistake of showing Vivian reports intended for Felise had been told to keep silent about it, but he gossiped to somebody who eventually carried the story to Felise. She was already determined to find out whatever she could about Vivian. Lerod may have quieted her for a time with plausible explanations, but when she learned that Vivian was, in a way, under Lerod's own roof—well, it was too much. She stormed at Lerod. He explained that Vivian had to be "watched."

"Well, why not watch her like you did Georgette? Or John Thomas? Or this latest—McFarland?"

"In my own time. In my own time," he replied evasively.

Felise, exasperated beyond control, descended on Vivian one day when Lerod was away and Mrs. Hudson was out. Stripped of unessentials, the conversation was something like this:

"Why, Clare Goold, what is the matter with you?" said Vivian, when she saw the rage that the woman had brought with her.

"I am not Clare Goold. You know it—or ought to."

"Who are you?"

"For one thing, I am Felise Dobell, and for another I am Mrs.——"

Vivian was astonished and filled with vague horror.

"That awful woman!"

"What awful woman?" Felise demanded, honestly surprized.

"Felise Dobell."

"Awful woman? What do you mean?"

"She is a criminal—a 'crook queen.' You must be joking?"

" 'Crook queen'? That's me. And you must be crazy to say I am joking. Yes, I am Felise Dobell for one thing and Mrs. Felix Dorel for another. Understand me?"

"No," said Vivian, whose upset brain was whirling.

"Who told you all about this awful woman?"

"Mr. Lerod."

"My husband!" She said it sardonically.

"No!"

"Yes!"

"It can't be," Vivian protested. "Mr. Lerod is——"

"My husband."

"I don't believe it."

"Ask him."

"Preposterous!"

"Why?"

"You have been much with Mr. Macree. If he were your husband, he wouldn't have —have—liked it."

"Oh, he likes it all right. It gave him an excuse to be much with you. And he expects to get Macree's money when Hearn dies. I'm the one that doesn't like it. I'm tired of it. I'm chased all over the country, ducking in and out of lodgings, and you—you lie around here comfortable and let my husband entertain you. Who are you, anyway?"

"I don't care to tell you!"

"You shall tell me!"

"No."

"I know who you are. You're a spy. You impersonated me to find out things, and you have made a fool of Felix."

"Of whom?"

"Of Felix Dorel—my husband."

"I don't know Mr. Dorel. How many husbands have you, anyway?"

"Oh, ——!" said Felise Dobell in baffled irritation. "You are such a Miss Innocence! Spell Lerod backward. D-o-r-e-l."

Vivian studied a moment and then trembled internally a bit at the discovery.

"Who are you?" Felise demanded again.

"I shan't tell you."

"I'll find out! I'm going to find out!"

And before Vivian was prepared, Felise sprang on to her like a wildcat and pulled the earrings off. In the scramble the chains of one were broken, snapped, but Felise got it, anyway.

Vivian for one had had no heart in the fight.

"If you tell Felix, I'll kill you!" Felise shouted from the door as she left.

FELISE, as most trained criminals do, knew how to identify the manufacturers of the earrings. On the pretext of having repairs made, she tried to get information out of the repair place. But she did not succeed. Nor were the jeweler's suspicions sufficiently aroused to report the matter to the house detective.

Mrs. Hudson, who had been absent at the time of Felise's visit, discovered from Vivian's manner that something had disturbed her, and finally got the facts. She, Mrs. Hudson, immediately defended Lerod. She had known him for years. He was unmarried. He had never been married. He was a fine man in every way. She didn't know Clare Goold or Felise Dobell, or whoever she was, and she could not understand what her motives had been unless to make trouble for Mr. Lerod. Thus Mrs. Hudson tried to pave the way for whatever explanation Lerod might think it advisable to make.

But Lerod only bluffed—and rather less successfully than he perhaps wished. He denied knowing Clare Goold was Felise Dobell. He denied that his name was Dorel or that he had ever heard of any one by that name.

Vivian was really alarmed, but she was helpless. She was wise enough not to show her alarm, though she saw Lerod was having her closely watched and, on the rather lame pretense that she must be protected from Felise Dobell and that "gang," insisted almost menacingly that Vivian must not leave the apartment. She watched for a chance to scoot out, but none came. However, though almost terrified, she kept an outward poise and resolutely refused to tell him anything about herself.

Lerod was becoming more than merely curious about her—though still fascinated by her—but disturbing things had begun to happen that caused him for a time to almost forget Vivian.

For one thing, a nightmare of a negro had handed him a note one late hour as he emerged from a café. A sinister "G" was sprawled below a message that said, if a certain man in jail at Washington were not "disposed of" within sixty hours, he, Lerod, would soon find his days and nights made terrible.

Lerod was terrified. He anxiously asked Hugo where he could meet Gaboreau and talk matters over.

"Mah boss say when yoh ask dat ter say fer yuh ter go ter youah fren's—de perlice. He don't talk wid 'snitchers,' he say!"

And the big negro walked abruptly away with the majesty of an ambassador from a powerful country who has just delivered a declaration of war.

Before the sixty hours were up, Felise Dobell, panic-stricken, came to tell of her fearful experience with a strange man—myself—and of how I had demanded information of Vivian.

Lerod was frightened and bewildered. He simply did not know what to think, but it made him more suspicious of Vivian.

Felise vowed that Vivian was a spy. Lerod did not believe it, but he was reduced to a state of doubt, and he was determined that she should be made to talk.

It was an odd situation. Lerod, in being cautious, did not want Vivian to learn that he countenanced whatever mistreatment might be necessary to make her talk, to tell all about herself. Macree, who got an inkling of what was in the air, protested against any use of violence.

"Of course not," Felise said scornfully, jealously. "You men don't want her beauty spoiled! I'd like to get her alone for ten minutes—I'd make her talk!"

It was to that arrangement that Lerod finally agreed; stipulating, however, that Felise would have to get Vivian to some place other than his own apartment house. Macree was excluded from any familiarity with the details.

For that matter, Lerod was, too.

Felise was a woman scorned. Lerod loved this stranger. Felise felt that her own existence had become unendurable. But, with Lerod and Vivian both out of the way, her prospects would be brighter. Macree would be susceptible to blackmail if not to love. Moreover, she was terrified by the knowledge that Gaboreau had again been aroused. She was more afraid of him than of ten thousand policemen.

Her fear of Gaboreau was even greater than her love for Lerod, particularly in her present jealous condition. She had come to the point when she didn't care who Vivian was or what information might be tortured out of her. Felise was ready to quit the game; and a woman never quits the game of a man she loves without damning him and the "other woman," too.

Felise cunningly laid her trap. She said to Lerod:

"I'll find a good apartment some place. You see that this mystery woman is brought there. Then you come and hide in a closet and listen. I'll make her talk—and she will still think you are a gentleman! You can keep on making love to her!"

"Drop that talk," Lerod ordered. "This is business."

"Business, all right. Mine," said Felise enigmatically.

WTHEN something further happened, before the arrangements were completed for disposing of Vivian, that threw Lerod, Felise and Macree into consternation.

They alone knew who that person was of whom Lerod had spoken to Vivian as the robber-baron, and whom the police searched for as the Mysterious Unknown.

Macree was practically worthless as an assistant in the plot—except that Lerod had his eye calculating on the far-distant future and clung to Macree tenaciously on the count of future prospects. So it happened that Felise and Lerod had become the personal attendants of the robber-baron when he emerged to take a personal interest in any of the criminal work.

When the "baron" determined to meet and speak with the striped bandit in person, obviously no one but Felise or Lerod could drive the car on such a mission as fetching the "striped bandit," and Lerod was needed to act as a sort of body-guard for the baron in the tough, dangerous neighborhood where the rendezvous had been arranged.

The striped bandit proved a Tatar. The robber-baron was wounded. Lerod and Felise were both left in a condition of almost bewildered terror—all of which strengthened Felise's determination to get out of Lerod's dangerous game and at once dispose of and punish him for having loved another woman.

It took some days to develop her plan and make her arrangements, for she was determined there should be no slips. She plotted with care. At the same time she kept as much out of sight as possible, for she was terrified both of the police and of Gaboreau. But at last all was ready. She reminded Lerod, who had been working night and day to find clues and to strengthen his gang, that the time had come to make "that woman talk."

Felise met him by appointment on the street and told him that, if Vivian would be at the Klemscott, Apartment 6, around ten o'clock and he could come about ten thirty and slip in, he would hear all that was being said.

Deaf Anne had caught his promise and conveyed it to me. It was I who kept the appointment. All that had led up to it and all that had happened, the conversations and movements, were of course unknown to me at the time. What Vivian told me in her confessional mood was the merest, vaguest skeleton of an outline. She did not even fully doubt that Lerod was not a detective. But she knew he was a brute. She was heart-sick, folly-stricken and ashamed.

Neither she nor any one else knew that, after leaving Lerod that afternoon, Felise had hastened to a telephone and spoken confidentially to a man who did not know her name. She asked this man—Burgess—if he cared to catch Felise Dobell? If so, then hold himself in readiness to hear a message that would come about ten o'clock.

Mrs. Hudson had brought Vivian to the Klemscott at ten o'clock, had taken her to the door of Apartment 6 and told her to go in without knocking—that she would find a friend in Miss Williams. Vivian, of course, knew nothing—then—of what was being planned.

Mrs. Hudson did not stay to see or listen after Vivian entered the apartment.

Vivian went in. The apartment was empty. She could see that no one was living there. Something ominous was in the air—it is always in the air of an empty apartment, conventionally furnished, empty, lonely as if life had fled from its cold presence. Vivian went from room to room. She came back and locked the door. She was ready to run, to try to escape. Then the telephone rang.

"Hello, Felise?"

Vivian recognized the voice. With a kind of choking resolution she said it was.

"Listen, I'm delayed. Make that woman talk. I'll come later. Do anything. But don't let Macree know—the fool loves her! Choke her to death—but she has to talk! We've got to find out about her and then get out of sight. That —— striped bandit is Gaboreau's man, and Gaboreau knows that Conrad Hearn is back of us! It's a —— of a mess. But find out who she is—if she's made a fool of me, I'll kill her!"

With that he hung up.

In excitement, almost crazed, he had spoken a name that never before, probably, crossed his lips to a telephone.

One may imagine the thrill that it gave me when Vivian repeated the message. In a flash the picture filled down to almost every essential fact, though I was mystified by hearing the striped bandit linked with Gaboreau. Details were carefully filled in later.

That was why Vivian was desperate, and that was why she felt an actual welcome for the striped bandit. Gaboreau was no longer an enemy of hers. As far as she knew, all trouble between him and myself had been settled when his niece married my nephew. The strange alliance seemed to have brought peace.

She did not fully, or scarcely at all, understand the message that Lerod had flung at her. But I did. It filled in pretty completely the sketch that she had given me of her experience. She knew only that he was a dangerous brute who had hoodwinked her.

I was to learn later what had happened to so throw Lerod off his balance. Gaboreau was practically without power—that is, he had no gang, no agents to speak of, nothing like in former times—but he had an infinitude of cunning, and he knew human nature.

The message that delayed Lerod had been shoved into his hand by an angular fellow, unmistakably Irish, whose fingers, if observed, would have shown a peculiar sensitive nervousness. Joe Connolly, summoned from his obscure retreat, did not dare—had he wished—to refuse to act as Gaboreau's messenger.

The note said:

Sixty hours passed. If you think the striped bandit has even begun to strike, you are a fool. Three men dead—try to catch him again, will you? Go to your police friends—go to them, you dog. Not Burgess, not Hearn, not the Lord Himself can save you.

And Lerod went to Conrad Hearn as fast as motor power could carry him. He was terrified almost out of his wits by insinuations that had actually said nothing definite, except that he could not save himself, was damned—which threat is always in the keeping of the future and may be used by anybody at any time.

Felise, traitoress, telephoned Burgess that "Felise Dobell" could be found, together with her man—with Dorel, alias Lerod, alias Collins, alias Shaylor, at Apartment 6, Klemscott. It was the name "Shaylor" that electrified Burgess and Brown, of the Secret Service, who, being in the city, had already been notified of the clue that would be—or at least was promised—telephoned. Shaylor had a record, a vicious one. He was an ex-convict—an escaped convict.

As frequently happens in a crisis of the kind, the police bungled. Instead of sending a hundred men, or at least a squad, Burgess was a little skeptical of the tip, and, though he came eagerly, he came with too few to face a really desperate criminal. The police would have fewer casualties if they had less courage and did not, as in this case, give the determined crook such low odds as four to one. Particularly, as no wise officer—or all-around gunman even—will shoot when a dangerous character gets the drop on him. The trigger-finger is quicker than the most supple wrist.

Burgess and Brown and two other officers came pell-mell. They got into the apartment house by rousing the landlady and so approached Apartment 6 as stealthily as I had done. They listened and heard voices. Vivian was completing her story to the masked bandit—myself—who understood it much better than she could have imagined. A story that showed why any stranger would have been particularly welcome—and especially the striped bandit. In the few minutes between Lerod's brutal conversation under the misapprehension that she was Felise, Vivian had tried to reach me by telephone. But Yang Li was a mute. He could hear but not reply. He had gone to get Jerry. But Vivian, impatient, had hung up. She tried then to get Macree but failed. Then I had knocked—and with a sort of fatalistic resignation to face anything—but to make an alarming noise in facing it, if necessary—she had opened the door.

WHEN Burgess knocked so unexpectedly, we were surprized into a moment of silence. She looked at me inquiringly. We thought Lerod had come.

I slipped into the next room, left the door half open and, standing behind it, peered through the crack below the hinge.

Vivian opened the door and two men presented revolvers. Two men more were crowded into the background, and behind was the landlady—at once frightened and curious, in consternation over the reputation of her house and eager to see the drama.

"Well," said Vivian, rather surprized, but poised.

"What's your name?" demanded Burgess, with that polish and courtesy that so characterizes the police in dealing with suspected persons.

The others were searching the room with their eyes. They all had heard voices—knew some one else was there.

"It would perhaps be better if you would tell me who *you* are?" she said as coolly as any actress in a rehearsed drama.

Burgess pushed back his coat and disclosed the badge of office—

"From Headquarters."

Vivian had no fear for her own safety. Inconvenience and humiliating annoyance, yes. But she thought they had come for the striped bandit.

"What's your name?" Burgess demanded again.

The others were edging into the room, and Vivian was giving way before them.

"Miss Rublee," she said.

That was her name, too. Her maiden name had been restored with the divorce.

The men came into the room, expectant, watchful, armed—two of them with revolvers in hand, two with hands at belts. Shaylor was a desperate character. The landlady, shaking nervously, stood at the door.

"This the only way out?" one of the men asked her.

"Yes," she said. "Only door."

"Shoot to kill," said Burgess. "He's bad."

The other men drew their guns.

There was I, waiting, wondering. If I stepped out as Everhard and explained, I could save gun-play. But Brown of the Secret Service had suspected me from the first when he came with that note written by Vivian and found on McFarland's body. Too, I would be searched and identified as the striped bandit. My apartment searched, too. Circumstantial evidence had me beyond all power of explanation. Vivian's long connection with Lerod would be convicting evidence. There was nothing to do but fight it out.

I did not arrive at that conclusion by reasoning. I simply realized it. I could have escaped with a degree of ease—slammed the door and plunged through a window. The apartment was on the ground floor. Even wisest of detectives, when excited, do not think of everything.

I could have shot two guns from the hands of any two men before they knew the fight was on; but the other two men—I would have had to shoot to kill to break even with them. I did not want to shoot to kill, even to hurt. I am not squeamish about hurting—except men who are conscientiously doing their duty, a respectable duty. True, I had shot Detective Perkins—but I was in an exceptionally wicked humor that morning.

"Where's Shaylor?" Burgess demanded.

"Who?" Vivian was honestly puzzled.

"Don't come that. Don't come that. We know he's here."

Two men, with looks and an exchange of vague gestures, decided to explore the apartment. They came forward.

"Hands up!" I said, thrusting the barrels of two automatics through the crack made by the hinges of the door. All four men were in line of fire. I said it not in the thick mouthing of the striped bandit but sharply. I meant it. The room I was in was unlighted. They could see nothing but the sinister barrels of those guns.

A fusillade would probably have penetrated the wood and reached me. Again, it might not. Anyway, I had the advantage, and I appeared to have a much greater advantage than I did have. There are few men who care to fight a duel with any one who fires through a crack. The best marksmen might not send the bullet home.

The two men in the foreground flung their hands up, dropping their automatics. It wasn't cowardice. It was good common sense. Besides, Shaylor—whom they thought they were after—Shaylor, who was Dorel, Lerod, and the police probably didn't know who all else—was known as a "killer;" though with a kind of blood-loving perversion he seemed to prefer the knife. The knife is quieter. That is why most assassins prefer it.

"Drop those guns. Hands up!"

I said it again and meant it. I was in earnest. Before I would have been caught, I might have done things I should have always regretted.

The automatics of Burgess and Brown fell to the floor. Their hands were up.

There was no chance even of Vivian recognizing my voice. I do not speak slowly, not even with the barest trace of dragging my words, on such occasions as this.

"You—landlady—come into the room and shut that door!"

She was outside the range of my automatics, but she didn't know it. I could see her, but I couldn't have twisted a pistol around to have reached her. I didn't want to reach her. I wanted quiet and peace.

She came in and shut the door.

"Miss Rublee," I said, "kindly pick up those discarded guns and put them on the table."

Silence. Only the tense breathing of the rigid men—humiliated, furious, but under the "drop" of a gunman—as Vivian quietly, yet shaking a little, picked up the guns and put them on the table.

I quickly stepped back, kicked the door further open and stood before them, automatics leveled, in the doorway. And they saw that I was the striped bandit.

Burgess swore— blurted out an oath of surprize.

I could afford to be thick-tongued and polite. Besides, there was a chance that somebody might then be reminded of my voice if I did not disguise it.

I said something to Burgess about meeting him thus again and the pleasure of it. I identified Mr. Brown, saying I had often heard of him and was pleased at the chance to meet him. I assured the other men that it was an unexpected honor. I inquired of Burgess as to how my friend Perkins was doing. I apologized to the landlady for having been the cause of disturbing her peace.

Then I lined them all up, searched them, removed the handcuffs from their pockets, and, making sure to take the keys, I set about keeping them from giving chase. I handcuffed them all together, back to back—landlady and all. Or rather Vivian did it, and I superintended. Then I thrust gags—gags made by tearing the landlady's sheets, taking them from the linen closet, I knew that the gags could soon be worked loose, but I did not care. All I wanted was about five minutes start.

Also, I removed the badges from Burgess and the two policemen. I let the badge of Brown alone. Even I did not care to tamper with the majesty of the Secret Service more than was necessary. I can understand why crooks look with terror on the day when the police shall be Federalized. But police—they are only city officials. One may have sport with them. They hate above all things to lose their badges. That is one reason I took Burgess'. I thought I might possibly have some use for one of the others.

I broke the guns on the table and threw the cartridges, together with what others I found on the men, out of the window. I didn't want any casual passers-by rushing in and finding arms conveniently at hand.

I knew there was a police machine outside. Burgess never walked any distance, anyhow. He was too fat. I wondered if there was a chauffeur. I didn't think so. But one could never tell. I came very nearly not thinking of it. But belatedly I asked—

"Which one of you men drove the machine here?"

No answer.

"Nod your head. Which was it?"

No answer.

It might be stubbornness, but it was more likely to mean that there was a chauffeur outside. If so, I would have that gentleman to deal with.

I told Vivian to bring her wraps but not to put them on. We went into the hallway quietly.

"Leave your wraps here," I said. "Go out and tell the chauffeur that he is wanted inside. That you are the landlady. Come back in with him—I'll nab him as he comes through the door."

AS SHE went out, I heard the whirring roar of a machine, haste-driven. It came to the Klemscott. I was afraid that reinforcements had arrived. Perhaps word had been left for a squad of policemen or the reserves to follow. But then four men should have been enough to handle Shaylor.

I tried to peek through the door, but the vestibule entrance cut off my view of the machine that had just pulled up, though I could see the other—the police car with a driver waiting at the wheel.

Vivian disappeared. She had looked toward the machine that had just come, and then she had disappeared. I waited. I saw the chauffeur watching uneasily. Then the other machine roared away from the curb. As it passed, I glimpsed Vivian—or rather a bareheaded woman—in the heavy roadster beside a man whom I could not identify.

To put it very mildly, I was exasperated.

In a way I couldn't really blame Vivian for taking a good chance to escape; but I could scarcely dissociate the fact that she had run from me from the fact that she did not know who I was. And that hurt. It would have been extremely poignant if she had run, knowing that I was Don Everhard.

But then fortune had intervened to hand me a jolt. I found afterward how it came about. Felise Dobell, after sending the police to the Klemscott to catch Vivian—who was to be arrested as Felise Dobell—and Lerod, whom she had exposed as Shaylor—the only name by which the police really knew him—had made haste to get in touch with Henry Macree. She told him that the police had come into the Klemscott—who had tipped them off she could not imagine, but the game was up!—and she had barely escaped. She said that they had arrested Vivian and were waiting for Lerod. She, no doubt, thought that Lerod had long ago been arrested, and she told her story to arouse sympathy in Macree for herself.

Macree was very young. Also, he was pretty much of a fool. He had not even begun to realize how serious were the complications into which he had gotten himself. He only knew that as the nephew of a rich and powerful man he always had been shown unusual courtesy by the police—and other people. The idea of anybody ever arresting him on a serious charge was unthinkable. For one thing, he had no motive or impulse to do anything criminal like steal or murder. A society of Robin Hoods appealed to his imagination. And, like most pampered, careless people in this world, he believed whatever he wished to about the operations of Lerod and Felise and his uncle and was encouraged by them to such beliefs.

And didn't he know Burgess personally? Weren't Burgess and Hearn close friends? Wasn't all that was necessary to release Vivian merely his assurance to Burgess that the woman was all right and a friend of his?

He told Felise to warn Lerod—that he was going to get Vivian out of trouble. She begged, she pled, she threatened, she made a scene; but Macree was determined. Here was a glorious chance to play knight errant. And he took it. He was mad over Vivian, anyway.

Sheer, downright, stupid luck was with him. He rumbled alongside as Vivian came out of the door—and she took the easiest way of escape. Besides, didn't she know from Lerod's message that Macree was different from the others? And she did not need to be told that Macree was in love with her.

That is how it happened that I was left to attend with the chauffeur—alone. Not that the chauffeur greatly troubled me. He did not.

I simply took off my mask, coat and hat, folded them carefully and laid them to one side of the door. Then, making sure the door would remain open, I dashed out to the police machine and told the chauffeur that he was wanted quick at Apartment 6. He came on the jump. I trusted to the vague light that he would not notice me closely or recognize me again if he did.

He raced down the hall. I grabbed up my things from the floor, bolted, shut the door, jumped into the police machine. And away I went.

True, I had sent help to my bunch of prisoners, but I had effected an escape.

I knew they would quickly use the telephone and have all the policemen in the city on the lookout for the machine. I didn't care. I drove but a few blocks, drew up at the curb, adjusted my clothes—put in the lining and reversed the coat—got out, walked half a block, caught a street-car, rode until I came to a popular café, got off, secured a taxi and drove home. Very simple.

Yang Li told me—writing it, of course—that there had been several telephone calls but no message. A woman had called once.

I went to bed and fell into a doze, wondering what I should say to Conrad Hearn—or rather what he would say to me—when I kept my engagement next evening with him. And I woke up with a start, having dreamed that Vivian had married somebody. I didn't know who. At that time I didn't know it was Henry Macree who had played *Young Lochinvar.*

XIV

THERE is much more to be told, though, when I awoke, the next morning, I felt that the little drama in which I had forced myself to a conspicuous rôle was futile, no matter how it should end. I had set out chiefly to find Vivian, and, when I had found her, she had left me. That she did not know what she was doing robbed me of a sense of injury without offering anything by way of consolation. True, there was Gowan McFarland's blood calling for vengeance, and poor vicious little Snips—savage gangster—could not rest in peace until justice, or something like justice in his gang code, had been done. Duty as a motive power is a poor substitute for love.

It must be recalled that much of what I have told in what seemed its proper place for narrative value was not known to me until after, sometimes long after, those scenes and incidents had taken place. About all that my knowledge really amounted to, stripped of its evidence and facts which had mostly come from Vivian, was that Conrad Hearn was a colossal and dangerous fool and that Felix Dorel, alias Lerod, alias Shaylor, was due to be shot down like a dog—if I could find him.

It had happened that, when Felise found herself discarded abruptly by Macree, she did not know which way to turn; so she fled pell-mell to Conrad Hearn. To her infinite amazement she found there her husband, Lerod.

They were discussing the note Gaboreau had sent to Lerod.

It appeared strange, even to Felise in her excited condition, that Hearn did not seem more concerned.

Lerod was almost beside himself. It would be bad enough to be caught, thrown into jail when Hearn's deep, powerful influence could get him out. But to be caught by Gaboreau—that meant death. Or at least he thought so.

Hearn, usually fearfully angry when any plans went awry, when anything like suspicion fell on to Lerod or Felise, was, however calm—like a man who knows more than he will reveal.

Besides, she reflected, it was possible that Hearn did not realize who and what Gaboreau was. She did. She had once worked for him, and the terror of him was deep within her.

She told her own story—told it just as it pleased her. There was no one to contradict. She said that the police had come and she had barely escaped and that Macree had dashed off to save the woman.

Hearn cursed loudly at that.

Then Hearn and Felise joined in abusing Lerod for having permitted himself to be hoodwinked and taken in by Vivian, who was now—in their opinion—obviously a spy.

"If she was anybody's spy, she was Gaboreau's," Lerod declared.

Strangely enough, that explanation seemed to relieve Hearn.

It did not relieve Felise in the least. She said bitterly:

"It doesn't make any difference whose she was. You fell for her."

"We must get hold of Henry," said Hearn.

"She must have pumped him long ago," Lerod suggested, eager to substitute a scapegoat for himself.

"He didn't know much, anyway," Hearn said.

"No, *you* never told her anything!" Felise taunted, extending a finger toward Lerod.

"It looks as if you've failed," said Conrad Hearn directly, accusingly at Lerod.

"If you can hush this up," Lerod answered, solicitously.

"I—yes; perhaps I can. You seem afraid of Gaboreau?" Hearn queried.

"If you knew him, you would be, too."

"Maybe I do know him," said Hearn. "But you have failed."

"It was you that monkeyed with that striped bandit," Lerod accused.

Conrad Hearn eased himself on his bed, where two wounds, one in the chest and one in the thigh, kept him confined.

"You told me you killed him—stabbed him," said Hearn accusingly again, referring to the murder of poor Snips.

"I did kill the fellow that was arrested as the striped bandit!"

"But that wasn't the fellow. This Gaboreau—" again it seemed Hearn knew more than he was revealing—"wouldn't be writing that way about the striped bandit if he were dead."

Hearn's manner of speaking increased Felise's nervousness. She was pretty badly shaken, anyway. Having plotted to betray Lerod, it was perhaps inevitable that her guilty conscience would suggest that Hearn was about to betray her and Lerod to Gaboreau. Better, a thousand times, be turned over to the police than to Gaboreau.

"I tell you that Snips was the striped bandit," Lerod insisted. "He was watched every minute from the time he left Ishman's office until he slipped out of that window. Then he was followed and seen to enter the limousine."

"Nobody got out or in after I started with him," Felise exclaimed.

"Something queer," Lerod declared.

"Very," Hearn agreed. "You have said Gaboreau was a devilishly cunning fellow. Do you think he arranged to switch striped bandits on us?"

"I know every man that Gaboreau could possibly lay hands on, and there is none of them big enough to play that striped bandit's game. He was in that room two days and two nights after he shot you—just waiting for somebody to come. He never made a move! My men were sure he was dead, but they had waited to make sure that there was nobody on the outside watching to catch them if they tried to go in. They could prop themselves up against the door in the alley and drink beer and loaf and listen."

"While you were trotting around with that woman!" Felise added.

"Lerod," said Conrad Hearn decisively, speaking from a conclusion carefully arrived at, "there's one man that I want. We need him. That is Don Everhard!"

Felise and Lerod protested at once. Lerod said something about Everhard having a newspaper reputation and being nothing more than a tinhorn gambler who had shot a couple of men when they were not looking.

HEARN listened. Then he said he knew very well why Lerod hated this man Everhard.

"But your name was Shaylor then. I've had him looked up from birthday to now.

I've had detectives go over his record from California clear here. There it is." He indicated a thick bundle of operatives' reports on the table beside his bed. "He has never at any time been tied up with the police, and he has never been caught. That takes brains. Tell me that fellow isn't a crook? He is. Of course he is. But he is too clever for even my detectives to get a thing on him. He made this Gaboreau take to the treetop; he put you in the position where you had to choose between fighting him or surrendering to the police—and you surrendered, Lerod."

"Gaboreau threw me down. I thought he'd get me out. That's why I've been saving up to get that Everhard. I haven't forgotten him—not by a long shot. But I've been busy."

"Yes, you've been busy all right!" Felise sneered. "I've been chased from one apartment house to another, but you kept that woman snug and cozy in a little nest all her own."

Lerod cursed Felise and told her to shut her mouth and keep it shut.

"You can forget your grievance against Everhard," Hearn went on, ignoring the interruption. "We need him. I know he's a crook. Why, every crook in the city knows him, swears by him. But he has played a lone hand because he didn't think there was anybody big enough to be in with him. I am big enough. You and Felise, too. We'll make a combination that can't be beat."

"I won't stand for Everhard," Lerod said.

"Then," said Conrad Hearn, rising up on his elbow and shaking a clenched hand at Lerod, "you refuse to take orders from me! By ——, I'll put you back in the penitentiary! I'll put you in the electric chair! When I say I want a thing done, I want it done! Hear me? I don't care whether you like a man or don't like him. If I want you to work with him, you work with him—or get out!"

"You—you throw me—" Lerod said, half crouching in his chair.

"Just keep quiet. I've got a gun here just poking out from under the covers. Will you work with Everhard or won't you?"

"Have you got him yet?"

"No, but I'll get him. I can pay the price. What do you say?"

"All right. You get him to call it off between me and him. I'll forget what he did to me. But I don't want him interfering with my gang."

"He won't," said Hearn. "There'll be other things for him to do."

"Are you really going to call it off with Everhard?" Felise asked in a kind of angry incredulity.

"Yes," said Lerod sullenly.

After some further talk about Macree and the police raid on the Klemscott and such, Lerod and Felise left together. They were no sooner out of the house than he turned on her furiously, abused her and—in the machine—struck her, said that her stupidity had brought the police down on to Apartment 6, that she was worthless and that, if she ever mentioned that "other woman" again, he would slit her throat while she slept.

They separated, Lerod to find Macree if possible but more importantly to get his gang moved out of the apartment house where he had so long made his headquarters. It was well for him that he did move with rapidity.

Felise, a woman scorned, once guilty of treachery and the more ready for that to repeat it, tired of the strain, disgusted with Lerod for being willing to make peace with a man he had repeatedly vowed to burn to death over a slow fire, worked herself into passionate, reckless fury of wrongs real and imagined. The next morning she went to the police and confessed.

She did not tell her full and detailed story until closeted with Burgess. All she asked for in return was protection. And, of course, that was promised with the usual facility of the police. To Burgess she told everything. Burgess' secretary was so excited over the discovery that Felise had turned traitor that he neglected to bolt with sufficient alacrity. He lingered too long to find out just what she might confess, and he was clapped into a cell and so cut off from communication with Lerod—who paid him a larger salary than Burgess.

Burgess nearly suffered apoplexy from sheer joy at his good fortune. He was excited. And the excitement with which he peremptorially demanded over the telephone that I should appear at his office disturbed me a bit, too, for a moment. I wondered if I were being summoned to explain something about the striped bandit.

"We know everything!" he shouted vaguely.

"You do? That's a large order."

"Confession—come on. You are in it."

"The devil I am," I said.

"Oh, it's great. Come at once."

I had never gone near Burgess' office in all the time I had known him and enjoyed a certain intimacy with him. I had no wish to be connected up with his friendship. Friends of mine whom I valued more than I did the poker acquaintanceship of Burgess would have looked askance on such familiarity.

I objected to going to the office. I would meet him anywhere else.

"But you must hear her story. You're in it."

"Whose story?"

"The woman, you know, we've been after so long," he tried to explain, cautiously refraining from naming her over the wire.

"You've been after a lot of women. What am I doing in her confession?"

"You know—the woman! Washington—McFarland——"

"What did she say about me?" I had reasons for fearing anything she might say if she associated me with the earrings.

"Come and see her."

I didn't want to see her. I said so. I was beginning to be somewhat assured by Burgess' attitude that he had no "official" claims on my presence. But I certainly did not want to meet Felise Dobell. I didn't meet her, either.

I met Burgess that afternoon in a quiet room and sat with him for some hours thumbing the manuscript of Felise Dobell's exhaustive confession. It was all there. I was there, but she hadn't guessed who I was. She had known me well by reputation, but we had never been formally introduced. She referred much to the striped bandit. I read this part with interest, though all the while Burgess was protesting that she must be lying about the striped bandit. Lerod, alias Shaylor, must be the striped bandit.

Burgess told me, with some modification of the facts, what had happened the night before. Who could that striped bandit be? And who on earth was that pretty woman of mystery? A detective from headquarters had visited the jeweler's, even as Felise had done, but he did not have the earrings to help as identification and the new repair clerk knew nothing of the earrings. Besides, if the other clerk had not been able to find out for whom they were made, it seemed pretty certain that there was no way to find out.

But, of course, what Burgess wanted was for me to play the part Conrad Hearn was going to offer. It wasn't friendship for me, I decided, that had made him eagerly confide in me. He saw a chance to use me. Besides, it was firmly imbedded in his head that I was connected with the Secret Service.

"DO YOU think for a minute," I asked, "that you or I or both of us together or with the help of half the police in the country and the Department of Justice, too, can weave a net that will hold Conrad Hearn? Do you realize that that man is not only a billionaire, but mad—crazy? Samson-like he can pull down the financial structure of this country. Some idiocy has attacked his brain which makes him believe that by a process of discriminating assassination and by organization of criminals he can forestall and check the socialism into which this Government is merging. He wants to be let alone. Remember some years ago it was pretty generally reported and believed that he bluffed Congress itself into whitewashing him by threatening to ruin himself to create a panic that would bankrupt the country? That sort of an idea had probably become an obsession with him and is now finding expression in this diabolical mixture of high finance and low crime. What are you going to do with the evidence after you get it? And with a war on our hands this would be a fine time to let the nation's biggest financier run amuck and deliberately create a panic. He could do it. You know he could. He would, too."

Burgess was impressed. In fact, I had been very much impressed by my own words. I had begun to talk about Conrad Hearn's immunity from arrest without fully recognizing the position he—and we—were in until my ideas flowed out in words.

"What are we going to do, then? He has to be stopped."

"Theoretically, of course, the thing to do is to assassinate him. His death would make a flurry in finance, but only a flurry.

Nothing to what will happen if he is arrested. Of course, if he could be caught and imprisoned and exposed all at once, nothing serious might happen. But your precious lawyers would break their necks getting him out. He has—as you have found already—financial interests that can put pressure on every judge below the Supreme Court, at the least."

"But we can't let him go on!"

"No, and you can't go to him and argue the matter. Conrad Hearn is one man that nobody ever argued with. But supposing that we do get evidence? Supposing he does enlist me and I confirm everything that we know now. What of it? You, yourself, right now down deep in your heart only half believe what this Dobell woman has said about him; and you believe that not because she says it but because you have known that there was some incalculably powerful and wealthy influence behind the crime wave in this country; and Conrad Hearn is a man with the power, influence and resource that fit into your preconceived ideas about the great Unknown.

"But, supposing I do get that evidence you want, what of it? You have the word of a woman who is a notorious crook, and you have the word of a fellow for whom the best that can be said is that he was never caught in crime. Let a lawyer for the defense get hold of my record, and what jury would fail to believe that the woman and I had not cooked up a gigantic blackmail scheme? Get Lerod to confess, and you only weaken your case. Get Macree to confess, and you get a young fool who has merely been made the dupe of other crooks. All Conrad Hearn would have to say would be, 'I never saw any of these witnesses before.' Nobody would doubt him. He is Conrad Hearn, and it is unthinkable that he would be implicated in any such plot. The very dimensions of the thing protect him. And, besides, see the unerring brains of the fellow: no one but Lerod, Felise and Macree could be produced as witnesses. Supposing I could—I would add no weight to the evidence.

"No, Burgess, you are not up against a crook—you are up against an embodiment of power. You haven't a chance. He'll break you, wreck the department, hound everybody to the ends of the earth and push them over, then turn around, get new agents somewhere and go on with his diabolical scheme. That is, if he feels like it. There's a kink in his head that makes crime attractive to him. He visited the Hole—thrilled to see these poor broken crooks that had once dared to break laws. He got your confidence and learned all the ways and means by which you were trying to catch him. A clever stunt that. Look out that the striped bandit doesn't try something similar. He thought I was a detective, but, having got that idea straightened out, he now thinks I'm a crook and that he can pay my price.

"Well, he can't—because, for one thing, I would never forget Shaylor, or Lerod as he now is called. Conrad Hearn isn't rich enough to keep me from settling with that fellow—if I can shoot when the police are not looking."

Of course, I felt pretty much that way, but I said it as much for Burgess' entertainment as for his enlightenment.

I knew in advance what his reply would be: I must pretend to work with Shaylor and get evidence for the police—for the Government.

"What the devil will the Government do with it after I get it—providing I do get it?" I demanded.

And we were back to our starting-point.

"We might get enough evidence," Burgess suggested, "to make him willing to retire from business."

"You might," I said, "get enough enticement in your melodious voice to lure a bull into retirement from a china shop, too. Hearn is a fighter, a seventeenth century pirate who came straggling into the twentieth. And seventeenth century pirates went down with the black flag flying."

"But, —— it," he said angrily, "we have to do something!"

"Of course. You have told the Secret Service of her confession?"

"Not yet. I wanted to get——"

"Surely. The police always want to get the credit. You have a prior claim on the prisoner. In fact, as she has never been a counterfeiter, a Mann Act violator, or broken any interstate commerce regulations, the Secret Service has no claim on her at all. It can't even appear openly in court as a part of the prosecution. But I suggest, nevertheless, that you take your confession and go down to Washington and talk it over."

He did.

IT WAS late when I finished with Burgess; so I did not go home. I had something to eat alone, dawdled at the table, watching people, idled along the street, looking at faces—why sit with your nose to a book when faces are on the street?—until the evening hour for my visit with Conrad Hearn. I had no plans touching him. Nothing more definite than the hope perhaps to find where Lerod could be located. I would then go to Lerod. Perhaps there would be no one around—just we two. A very old and bitter bargaining for each other's life would be settled.

But as regarded Conrad Hearn—in arguing with Burgess I had convinced myself that Conrad Hearn was unassailable. Spiders like myself and Burgess might weave around and around and over and across the unsuspecting bull, but at the first glimmer of our design he would get up and walk off.

I understood why Conrad Hearn thought that I was a clever crook. Appearances were against me in anybody's mind that reasoned as he did. He had passed judgment on me and then looked for evidence to support it. Most people do that sort of reasoning. I understand that even scientists usually first imagine what ought to be or could be, then go searching for facts that prove that it is. I had behind me a great deal of evidence that did not agree with a law-abiding existence. In fact, no one had ever before become sufficiently interested—as he had been—to go over my record.

I had been fortunate, for one thing, in escaping suspicion. For another, crooks who hated me—without knowing me as well as Gaboreau and Lerod did—knew very well, or thought they knew, that no stool-pigeon's tales against me would hold water. And the police—with all my dislike for them, I had never offended them sufficiently for them to be determined to "get something on me."

It was likely to be different if Detective Perkins ever succeeded in identifying me. That was something to worry about only when there was nothing else to hold my attention. I refuse to worry. It does no good. It causes one to make plans, elaborate plans, and to put faith in them—and then some imperceptible miscue puts the whole structure in a state of collapse. It is better to be resourceful than to let worry goad one into putting faith in foresight. For forty years the Germans worried about their next war—only to have their armies shattered by a general who, years before as a teacher in the French war college, had declared that war was not and could not be an exact science, that it was and must ever remain a terrible, vast drama where generals, no matter what their preparation, must play extempore rôles and use their heads instead of elaborate instructions taken from some Moltke's pigeon-hole.

So I worried about neither Perkins nor Conrad Hearn.

Hearn's house showed a bleak face of stone with but a little chin of walk between it and the low iron fence that kept pedestrians from putting casual feet on to his hand's space of a front yard. The house was squeezed on either side by two just like it, though there was a little yard space at the rear. A frigid block, partaking nothing of the warm life that flowed impudently along the street.

I knew, without having been told, that there were plenty of detectives about. I didn't see any. That is, I did not identify any. But the police were searching for Lerod, whom they called Shaylor, and, among other places, would keep an eye on all who came and went into this house.

I had a right to be there. I had a good excuse for being there.

However, it wasn't detectives or anything of the kind that gave me a jolt. I lifted the knocker, and, when the door opened, I was confronted by a monstrous big negro—Hugo. Any kind of a negro footman in Hearn's house might have seemed odd; such a gigantic creature was spectacular; but for him to be Gaboreau's negro was confounding. That Gaboreau might have maneuvered to cause Conrad Hearn to lose a footman and have succeeded in furnishing some one of his own choice was not incredible; yet that he should have succeeded in putting one so obviously out of place into that job was confounding.

I thought it over rapidly. Yet I can not say that I "thought" in the sense that I pondered and debated it in my own mind. I simply realized that one of three things had probably happened: Gaboreau and Hearn had made some sort of an alliance—for, if Hearn hoped to reconcile Lerod and myself, he might with more reason accomplish the other; Lerod and Gaboreau, unknown to Hearn, had joined forces; or Gaboreau had succeeded in getting Hugo into the household without Hearn's knowledge.

It didn't really greatly matter to me which of those things had been done. There was no advantage to me in any of them.

The big negro let me in without showing a glimmer of recognition.

"How are you, Hugo?" I asked as if I had been meeting him at that same door every day for months.

"Fine, sah, fine, sah."

"How long have you been here?" I asked it casually, as if interested in Hugo himself—not his being Hearn's footman.

"Mah first day, sah. Masteh Huahn 'spectin' yuah, sah."

I paused a minute and scribbled a note. I wrote:

> Dorel's ally or a neutral? Which?

Then I handed it to Hugo. I didn't fold it. I knew he would read it, anyway. I said:

"You will see that Gaboreau gets this?"

"Y'sah, y'sah. Ah'll see as he gets it."

Hugo took it without interest, as if accustomed to taking messages for a man who he would probably declare did not exist if any stranger should inquire for Gaboreau.

I went to Conrad Hearn's room.

A trained nurse, quiet, white, noiseless, met me at the head of the stairs.

"Mr. Hearn has been very nervous all day. You will please not remain long. The doctor has protested against his having company, but——"

She raised a hand in a little gesture of acknowledging the futility of trying to impose anybody's will, doctor's or any one's else, on Hearn.

I went into a large bedroom, surprizingly simple in furniture considering that the richest man in the world, or one of the very richest, anyway, was using it. The floor was hardwood with an Oriental runner from the side of the bed to the door. A table was beside the bed, and the table was covered with papers. Conrad Hearn lay on his side, somewhat propped up.

He was a big man, but he gave the suggestion of being bigger than he was. There was a certain repose about him, like a big dynamo at rest. Every feature was granite-like and prominent. Most rich men grow puffy or dyspeptic. To Hearn dollars had been not magic disks to conjure pleasures but missiles in warfare.

A man of perhaps thirty-five, but appearing older, one of those faded, rubber-like, immobile clerical men, was sitting by the bed jotting down instructions. This was one of his private secretaries taking orders from the field-marshal.

"That'll do now, Rodgers," Hearn said, with his eyes on me.

RODGERS arose and bowed. He passed me without a glance, but with a bow, and left the room.

"How are you, Richmond? Everhard? What do people who like you call you?" he said pleasantly, not effusively by any means.

"Either. Sorry to hear you are knocked out. Burgess said something about a motor smash-up."

Hearn looked at me with inquiring, steady eyes—eyes that gave the appearance of seeing much more than one cared to have eyes see. My rather irrelevant fancy at the time was, "What a wonder of a poker player was lost when big business got this fellow into its game!"

"Everhard," he said, speaking heavily, emphatically, as if about to make some observation that might effect empires, and by his tone rather keying up to nervousness, "do you know that this country is a —— oligarchy?"

I had heard plutocrats, rich men such as Hearn himself, accused of being some such monopolists of power, but it didn't seem the time and place to show that I had such information.

I said something perfunctorily to encourage him to go on.

He did.

"Do you know that this country with all of its tradition and democracy is under the thumb of the medical profession? Did you know that the health officers can at any time declare an emergency and seize the Government, declare a quarantine, suspend business and have anybody that breaks their orders locked up? I'm just finding it out. This tyrant that I called in to look after me has been enlightening me. I fired his nurses, and this morning he came back with two more and said that, if I fired those, he would quarantine the house for smallpox. Then he told me what the health officer of any city could do, what the Health Department of the United States could do. By ——, Everhard, any time they want to scare up a plague they can quarantine the Army and Navy, close every bank and store in the country and press the police into service to enforce their orders. Think what a conspiracy of doctors would mean? They can get cultures of diseases any time they want out of their laboratories, scatter them, set people to dying by the thousands, get the country panic-stricken, then seize the reins of government on the pretense of protecting its health! And who will guarantee that some medical Cæsar won't do that one of these days?"

Of course, Hearn was having his joke. But it showed me what ideas fascinated him. "Seizing the reins of government" was an obsession with him. His physician, to entertain him, had probably called attention to the indubitable power of the Health Department in case of emergency. That power had intrigued his fancy.

After some other conversation, he suddenly came directly to his interest in me.

"Everhard," he said, speaking less like one making a proposal than one giving instructions, "I have heard a great deal about you. I can make the fortune of any man that I am interested in. And I am interested in you. It wasn't an automobile that put two bullets in me. It was an assassin. The striped bandit. Now, I am no more of a coward than the average man. But I have other work to do besides fight assassins. I want to engage you to do that for me. Not as a detective," he hurried on. "Not as a personal guard or anything of that kind. The police are helpless against these people that have been killing off millionaires and congressmen. I want you to organize and go after them. I'll pay the bills. What do you say?"

Very cleverly done, indeed. Conrad Hearn probably knew better than to suggest a career of crime for me. He suggested that I organize a gang to be used for legitimate purposes—and he expected that it would, of its own weight, sink into crime. Getting me into his service was the main thing. Afterward he could gradually bring that service around to suit his purpose. He thought that I was a crook, but he did not want me to think that he thought so.

"The striped bandit?" I asked. "I didn't know he was an assassin?"

"He is. He's backed by somebody—I don't know who. The mysterious Unknown that Burgess is after, I guess. Anyway, I don't want him using me for a target."

Then Hearn went on to relate how the bandit had succeeded in getting into his bedroom and shot without warning—a story that I might have thought had some truth in it, had I not known better.

It was a curious tangle indeed. Conrad Hearn, himself the mysterious Unknown, suggesting that this Unknown was behind the striped bandit, who was myself. I held all the threads to this tangle, but I didn't see how my holding them would do me much good.

I inquired as to the nature of the organization he would expect me to get together.

"You know a lot of crooks. You have to set crooks to catch crooks—at least that's the principle the police work on. All crooks. You go ahead, and I pay the bills. All I want is peace of mind. You get your friends lined up—you know a lot of bold fellows, don't you?"

"A few, yes."

"Whom do you consider the cleverest crook?"

"There is no doubt of that. Antoine Gaboreau."

"Gaboreau? Gaboreau?" He seemed drawing the word across his mind as if it were very important for him to know how I felt about Gaboreau. Then abruptly, almost eagerly, "Could you get Gaboreau?"

I expressed doubts.

"But supposing I get him for you?"

"Could you?" I asked, very much interested.

"I think so. I have a way of getting what I want. And this Gaboreau—you see, the police rather suspected him of having had a part in the attempt to assassinate me. Gaboreau has appealed directly to me not to believe them. Says he is a poor old man, crippled, who is helpless and wants only to be left alone."

That did not at all jibe with what I knew of Gaboreau's character. It did not at all coincide with the taunting note—Felise Dobell had told of it—that had been thrust into Lerod's hand and caused him such consternation the night that Vivian had escaped with my help from the Klemscott. But, of course, I could not indicate that I knew anything about that note. To have done so would have been to tell of Felise Dobell's confession, and to have told of that confession would have been to let Hearn know that I knew he was the mysterious Unknown.

"Gaboreau is," I said, "a poor old cripple. But I wouldn't call him helpless. He can't walk, and he used to have a big negro, something like that——"

"That's he. The very fellow," Hearn interrupted quickly. "Gaboreau wants to come and see me personally. Said he could explain everything. But that he wouldn't think of trying to come unless this big negro—Hugo—could be at the door to meet him. He couldn't tell, he said, what hour of the day or night he would come. The police are after him."

"It's rather risky, isn't it, to have a fellow like Hugo in your house?"

"Why? There's nothing to steal—nothing that I care about. And, since I was shot, I need a big fellow like that in the house for a guard."

"But dangerous. I can't imagine myself caring to be guarded by some one Gaboreau selects. Especially, when for all you actually know, Gaboreau may be the one who is behind this striped bandit—and the others."

"THERE'S the point, Everhard. You have to trust men—up to a point. Gaboreau says that he does know who the striped bandit is—and that this fellow can easily be put out of the way.

"Then," I said quickly, "it looks as if you were about to employ Gaboreau to do the work you just proposed to me—put this striped bandit out of the way—protect you."

"Not at all. Not at all. Gaboreau will merely furnish the facts. You will have to do the fighting. Gaboreau will tell us who he is. It will be up to you to get him."

Gaboreau knew who the striped bandit was, all right; but if I "got" him it could be only by suicide! It was rather confusing. I jumped, for want of anything more intelligible, to the conclusion that Gaboreau was willing, or was pretending to be willing, to sacrifice the striped bandit, whom he had already claimed as his own personal agent, for the honor of being an associate with Conrad Hearn.

"Have you mentioned me to Gaboreau?" I asked.

A trace of hesitation—a swift decision as to which would be the better reply to make. Then Conrad Hearn said—

"Yes."

I believed that he had not lied.

"Then you have already met him, talked things over with him?"

My question was almost, if not quite, accusing. From almost pretending ignorance of Gaboreau, Hearn had gradually unfolded a rather unusual intimacy with him.

"Not face to face. No. We've had what you might call some correspondence. Here."

He fished under his pillow and brought out a wallet, extracting a familiar-looking handwritten note, which he offered to me.

> It is you the striped bandit is after. He may get you, too. But I know who he is. There's only one man can get him. Hugo will say who he is. I've had relations with this striped bandit that have become unfriendly, —— unfriendly. He's given me the double-cross. I'm through with him—through with him. I'll give up the striped bandit. If it's a bargain, put Hugo to answering your doorbell so I can get in some time—some time. G.

"When did this come?" I asked.

"This morning. We've had some correspondence before."

"Hugo mentioned my name as the one who could 'get' him?"

"Yes."

"Do you realize how strange that is? Gaboreau and I have had some trouble—and made no peace."

He knew it as well as any man, but he said that it was queer Gaboreau had never referred to it. Surely I couldn't hold a grudge against a man who was offering to do me service.

I wanted to get Lerod's name into the conversation. I did it by mentioning that Gaboreau also had had trouble with another man. I named him as Dorel, alias Shaylor, not caring to let Hearn realize that I knew Lerod—or knew of him under that name.

"They've made all that up," he said quickly.

"Really?"

"Yes. This morning. Met and talked things over. Come to an understanding. This Shaylor—" he was watching me closely—"isn't a bad fellow. Lerod is the name he uses now."

"Perhaps you don't know," I said coldly, "that this Lerod, Dorel or Shaylor—whatever you care to call him—and I have a little misunderstanding that isn't likely to be settled amicably?"

"Oh, yes," he said easily; "Lerod told me about that. He's willing to drop it. He was afraid of you—that's all that was the matter with him. We always feel we ought to hold a grudge against the men we are afraid of."

"Lerod—that low, unmitigable crook—told you!"

I said it with all the surprize that one would naturally feel in discovering that such a criminal had met and talked with a person like Conrad Hearn.

"Oh, now listen, Everhard," he began like one who is patiently taking the time to explain something to a person who should have had perception enough not to need the explanation. "I'm not going into this gang business in a small way. The police are helpless against that Unknown, you know. Besides, I wouldn't trust the police. Wouldn't be surprized if they were in league with him themselves. I'm going to make this fight, first, as a matter of my own self-protection, and second, for the good of law-abiding people, whom the police can't protect.

"I'm going to use everybody that can in any way contribute to the success of that fight. I'm offering to put you at the head of it, but I will expect you to use Lerod and Gaboreau without thinking of personalities. When I put a manager into a bank, I don't care anything about what his personal opinion is of the cashier in that bank. Does the cashier help the business? That's the touchstone. Now we are after a gang of crooks. The only way to beat them is to get a bigger gang. In that way we need Lerod—and Gaboreau."

"What will we do with this gang when it cleans the other out?"

"Time enough then to discuss what we shall do with it later. There is much that can be done."

"Rather unusual, isn't it, fighting for decency with crooks for recruits?"

"The devil with fire. In this world it isn't the means you use. It's the results that count—always."

I can't say that Conrad Hearn's arguments appealed strongly to me or that they would have appealed strongly to me if I had not known much more about them than he suspected. They may seem weak and unnatural to other people, too. But it must be remembered that they would have been very enticing to any man who was what Conrad Hearn thought that I was. He was not trying to seduce a "respectable" citizen; he was trying to make one who he believed was a thorough crook jump for the chance to organize a big gang of crooks with his powerful backing. No ambitious crook would have resisted; no crook at all could scarcely have failed to seize the chance.

The weak point was not in Hearn's arguments but in his understanding of my character. Not an excellent character, perhaps, but one that makes no alliance with crime—at least, not of the nature he proposed.

The most amazing thing was that Gaboreau had wormed himself into the situation. Felise Dobell had known nothing of that development. But then, Lerod himself was said to have come to an understanding with Gaboreau only that morning. Yet, obviously, Hearn had been in communication with Gaboreau for some time—and it had only been a few hours since Gaboreau delivered that threatening, taunting note to Lerod!

My mind, confronted with such complications, whirled about until like the click of a ball on a roulette wheel it settled into a definite conclusion. It was this: Gaboreau had used the striped bandit—myself—to bluff Conrad Hearn into a partnership.

He pretended that he was willing to effect a compromise with Lerod.

He pretended that he was willing to effect a compromise with me.

In other words, the deep-brained Gaboreau, audacious as Satan himself, had cut into Conrad Hearn's game and was dealing the cards to suit whatever unfathomable purpose he had in mind.

Conrad Hearn might be a wizard and power in finance; in crime-intrigue he was a puppet when pitted against Gaboreau.

I could understand why Lerod should be willing to accept a compromise from Gaboreau.

I could not understand why Gaboreau should be willing to offer it. Gaboreau might forgive such as I, who had always fought him—or at least never been allied with him—but he would never forgive whoever were traitorous.

On the other hand, here was an exceptional opportunity offered Gaboreau to seize the chance to organize and uphold, with Conrad Hearn's unlimited backing, the greatest crime organization conceivable. With those men leagued together, the result would be appalling.

Now Gaboreau would no more let me or Lerod or anybody else be at the head of that organization than Satan would let a grimy imp play with his iron poker of a scepter.

In other words, we were all—myself, Conrad Hearn and Lerod—just so many flies getting entangled in that old spider's web. And, if there were anybody on earth cunning enough to spin a web that Hearn himself could not break through, Gaboreau was the man.

I asked the question uppermost in my mind—

"How did Gaboreau first approach you?"

Hearn intermixed a lot of lying with the truth of his reply.

I shall omit what I know to have been false and present what I now imagine to be the facts, not restricted to what Hearn told me—and some not facts at all, but conjectures.

Gaboreau was precipitously driven into hiding by Lerod's attack made through the confession of a witness at Washington.

Incidentally, that witness was still alive and in jail, but he had repudiated his confession. He said that he had never seen Gaboreau, had had nothing to do with Gaboreau, but that he was an anarchist and all that sort of thing. Nobody believed him, but he had at least made himself worthless as a witness against Gaboreau.

Gaboreau had no gang, but he had his terrible name and reputation. He had his mind—that wonderfully analytical, far-sighted brain. He began to press gangsters who knew of him into service. None dared refuse. He called for the whereabouts of Dorel, alias Shaylor, perhaps alias somebody else. There never was a crook, who, unless he wholly abandoned crime and went into some far place, no matter what alias he took or work he did, but would be remembered and known to scores of such creatures as, for instance, huddled in the Hole. A dozen lips hastened to relay Lerod's secrets—or as much of them as were known. Lerod's own men, many of them, trembled at the potency of Gaboreau's name and gave Lerod the double-cross.

Gaboreau knew that Lerod was not big enough to have acquired the power he had acquired without some influence other than his own ability.

He cast about to determine who had given Lerod such influence; who was the big and unknown person.

The friendship of Lerod with Macree was obvious.

It was but a step further to Conrad Hearn.

Gaboreau, with characteristic audacity and accuracy, did a bold thing. He convincingly showed Hearn how much greater was he, Gaboreau, than Lerod and how greatly Lerod stood in fear of him.

Gaboreau boldly suggested to Hearn the same sort of thing that Hearn later suggested to me—that his, Hearn's, life and interests required an organization that would be answerable to him, Hearn, only.

Hearn knew enough, and soon found out more, about Gaboreau to be interested—particularly as Gaboreau's suggestion merely agreed with what Hearn had already effected and was trying to perfect. Too, Hearn was almost daily discovering how shaken and disturbed Lerod was by fear of Gaboreau—until Hearn, in his own mind—as Gaboreau had planned—was ready to discard Lerod completely if he could have Gaboreau.

But Gaboreau had not shown any wish of having Lerod discarded or of carrying out the threats made against him. His object seemed only to have been to terrify Lerod until Hearn should lose respect for him and recognize Gaboreau as the better man.

Then Gaboreau had said to Hearn—

"You induce Lerod to work with Everhard and leave the rest to me."

Lerod was bullied into agreeing to work with me.

Then Gaboreau offered a reconciliation with Lerod, and Lerod leaped for it.

And Gaboreau—from behind a half dozen masks, with motives so hidden in subtlety that no one suspected his real purpose—began to prepare the final act of his tragedy.

"HEARN," had said Gaboreau to Lerod, "is infatuated with the idea of having this fellow Everhard on his staff. But you and I will work together. We'll dispose of Everhard in our own good time and then work Hearn to our hearts' content."

Lerod welcomed such an unexpected alliance as he would have welcomed a lifeboat in a hurricane.

So the stage was set. Gaboreau, with no power but cunning, had put the actors into their rôles. He had played both ends against the middle, made plans and countermined his own plans, digging to a depth that defied penetration. His resource is perhaps most effectively shown by the way he used the activity of the striped bandit, with whom he had not the slightest personal connection, to further his own ends, frightening Lerod and disturbing Conrad Hearn.

The surprizing thing, perhaps, was that Gaboreau had not revealed to Hearn who the striped bandit was. As a matter of fact, Gaboreau did not actually know—but he was confident. Circumstantial evidence is often treacherous if one doesn't know how to use it. But Gaboreau for forty years had been little more than a prisoner in his chair. Much of that time he had directed the operations of an increasingly large gang of criminals, and his brain had been sharpened until it penetrated into and examined evidence; saw facts and solid conclusions where a more normal brain would have been baffled completely.

"What," said Conrad Hearn to me after a long silence, "is your decision?"

"What," I answered with some audacity, "would be your decision if the devil carried you to the mountain top and showed you the whole world—to be had for the asking?"

"By ——," Hearn cried, blasphemously repudiating the example of Him who had scorned such temptation, "I'd take it! You would, too, wouldn't you?"

"The original temptation was not rejected by One of mere flesh and blood."

The nurse, anxious-faced, for I had remained long and Hearn's voice had been loud, came in with a pretense of giving him medicine.

"Get out!" said Hearn to her with the gruffness of one speaking to a dog.

"But, Mr. Hearn——"

"Get out. Get out of the house. I don't want you nosing around. Get out. You and that other one, too. Tell the doctor I don't want to see him again. Send that nigger here. I'll tell him to keep that doctor out. I am cured. I'm through with you all. Get out!"

This amazing outburst disclosed an unsuspected capacity for violent passion. He looked so granite-like that one would never have expected to see his face bluish with passion, his big arm swinging in fierce, frantic gestures.

The nurse, alarmed, ran from the room.

"It's settled, then?" I said with a composure I did not feel.

Conrad Hearn had dropped twenty thousand leagues lower in my estimate of him. Gaboreau was the only man I had ever seen who could fly into a passion and not be ridiculous—for one never knew when Gaboreau's passions were merely a part of calculated design. In part they always were!

"Sit down; sit down, Everhard. Let's talk it over. These nurses are spies. I'll get rid of them. I'll get rid of everybody in this house but that nigger and that —— Macree. I'd like to know where he is. Everhard, my own nephew has made a fool of himself over some——"

What Hearn called my wife is not for me to repeat. He was saved an unpleasant ten seconds by the fact that I knew he did not know she was my wife, and for me to have revealed it would have been to drop my mask and reveal most that I knew. And I was not ready to do that.

"I haven't seen or heard of him for twenty-four hours. I love that boy, Everhard. I love him. But he's a fool. When I die— Great God! To think what an idiot he'll make of himself. Sit down. Let's talk things over. We've come to an understanding. We'll have to have Gaboreau and Lerod here together with us one of these nights soon. Ah, that will be some combination!"

I left.

In the hall below I found Hugo, grim, black giant—anybody would have been helpless in his terrific arms—and he delivered to me the answer from the message I had two hours before sent Gaboreau. I had then asked if he was Dorel's ally or a neutral. All that I had learned in the meantime had not settled that question for me. Gaboreau was too deep for anybody to be sure of judging by appearances.

My answer, translated out of Hugo's unimpressive dialect, was:

"Be at the Hole at one o'clock, and you will find out whether I am neutral or Dorel's ally."

It was then eleven. I would have preferred to have gone home. I had not been home since morning, early morning. I was disturbed. Hearn's chance remark about Vivian had been like an arrow. Her name linked as it was with Macree's.

But Gaboreau had written, "Be at the Hole at one o'clock and you'll find out."

That might mean anything, too. It might mean that Lerod would know I was coming and be prepared to shoot from behind some shadowed rafter. It might mean that Lerod would be there and not know I was coming, and we should settle our quarrel while Gaboreau peered from the shadows. He was capable of staging just such a dramatic affair. He staged them even more dramatically—bringing inveterate enemies unexpectedly face to face. And always he managed to be around some place to look on. He never went to the theater. Perhaps his abnormal brain could never lose itself in the fancy that such play was real. He used up real flesh and blood for his dramas.

As I desired above many other things to find out—as he had said that I would—I decided to keep the rendezvous. It was a long way. Perhaps two hours of walking would leave me far from there. But I preferred to walk a while, anyway. I started.

Nothing happened on the way.

I descended the steps of the Hole at one o'clock. Punctuality is one of the points of pride with me. The same bartender was there. The same crowd, leering and chattering and lounging. The jets flared; the shadows crouched behind pillars and in corners. Both my hands were in my pockets. Perhaps I am overly timorous in keeping my fingers about the handles of my guns, but I knew it would be impossible to answer if some fellow's first shot made a ghost of me. I came down the steps slowly, looking to right and left.

A man, who had evidently been watching, rose from a table and hurried toward me. At first I did not recognize him. Then I saw that it was Joe Connolly.

He came up and hastily told me to go back toward the rear and act as if I were going up the stairs into the flop-house above but then to come along the wall to where I had once before—in an escape—made my way through a tunnel and into the old hag of a fence's burrow across the street.

The prospect was not reassuring, though I had faith in Connolly. That narrow passageway of a tunnel was a wonderful opportune place to shoot some one down.

BUT I went alone. Connolly remained behind.

My suspicions flared when I saw the door at the other end was open. I hesitated, listening.

"Come on; come in," Gaboreau's voice snarled from the darkness.

I stumbled through, behind my electric torch. He struck a match and lighted an oil-lamp by his elbow on the table. In that spotch of yellow light his face, grotesquely shadowed, was like some devil's scrutinizing a new arrival. As near as I could tell, he was alone. The cellar was cluttered with dirty bundles and scattered rags as before.

"Sit down," he waved me toward a backless chair. "We'll talk."

I sat down.

"The world is full of clever people, isn't it, Everhard? Of people who think they can tie poor old helpless Gaboreau in a gunny sack and drop him into the river—kersplash! You've always had ideas like that, too, haven't you, Everhard?"

I dropped a hand with a gun in it, muzzle toward him, across my knee. He knew that, no matter how quickly he might, with some of his devilish contrivances, strike at me, I could—if with nothing more than reflex action—shoot quick enough to hit him.

He stared down at the gun and laughed.

"You still put your faith in lead, don't you? Lead and powder. It's brains, Everhard, that count. Not little mechanical toys. What was Samson? A mere hulk of a brute like Hugo. He didn't destroy his enemies. He didn't use brains. When the Philistines saw the temple shaking, they simply ran out into the street and watched it fall and crush him. Look at my arms—" he extended his puny, reed-like arms—"and tell me: Do you think I can push down the pillars of a big temple?

Biggest in the world. Mammon's. On Wall Street. Crush all my enemies."

I was tired. Though Gaboreau might be obscure, he was never pointless. Yet I was in no mood to fumble with his puzzles.

"All I want to know, Gaboreau," I said decisively, "is this: Have you taken Dorel, Lerod or Shaylor—whatever you prefer calling him—back under your protecting wing?"

"What if I have?" he screamed at me.

"Use some of those brains you have been bragging about and decide for yourself."

He was suddenly angry.

"—— you Everhard; you need to have some of the vanity knocked out of you. You think poor old Gaboreau is afraid of you, because he simply liked you enough not to kill you. You think you are a match for him! I'll show you. Name of God, I'll show you! And remember Samson, Everhard. Remember what Samson could have done if he had had brains!"

I ignored his outburst to say:

"I spent the evening with Conrad Hearn. You have tied him up nicely, but what are you going to do with him now that you have him in your gunny sack?"

Gaboreau cried—

"Did that fool tell you?"

"Don't you suppose he had to tell me something when I saw Hugo at the door?"

"What did you tell him?" Gaboreau demanded.

"That I'd sooner go to bed with the devil than let you get a hold on me."

"You did not!"

"How do you know?"

"You are alive!" Then quickly: "How do I know? I'll tell you, Everhard. Why do you suppose Hugo is there? To open the front door? No, by ——! Hugo has an extension ladder hid away in the basement. Do you see? A heavy fireman's ladder. Remember—he's a powerful brute. The ladder is padded and oiled. Oh, I planned all that carefully—and since when do my plans fail? At night he runs it up the side of the house. Daring? Of course. Impossible, too! That's why I succeed—because I dare the impossible! And that negro puts his ear to the crack of the barely raised window in Hearn's bedroom. What he hears, I know! Think I would believe you? No. Think I would believe Conrad Hearn? No. But I would believe that big ignorant negro. I've saved his neck. He's grateful. You never were!"

It is true that, as I have mentioned before, Gaboreau had on occasion completely reversed himself toward me and extricated me from very severe embarrassments. But, for all that I knew, he might have done it simply to have a claim on my gratitude. He never forgave ingratitude. It was useless for me to conjecture why he had done that or why he did any of many things. I couldn't follow his purpose any more than an eye can follow a bullet.

"I am not a crook," I said defensively, explaining why I had never shown what he considered proper symptoms of appreciation for his good service.

"The striped bandit is not a crook!" he screamed ironically.

"The striped bandit may be. I can't say anything about him."

Then it was that with rapid phrases Gaboreau told how he had suspected me.

I was ready to go. I had found out nothing. I had heard nothing of importance but enigmatic threats delivered in the allegory of Samson. I didn't understand them. I would not understand them no matter how much I speculated.

"Gaboreau," I said meaningly, "you and I have to come now to a definite decision. Do whatever you want to with Conrad Hearn. I don't care. But leave Lerod to me and stand clear. You, or any other man, have never heard me make a direct threat before, but I tell you now that, if you ever get in my way again, I'll kill you."

"War to the knife, then?" he asked with surprizing quiet and a curiously disturbing smile on his thin, gumless lips.

"Yes."

"And how do you suppose you could find Lerod if I don't find him for you?"

"I shall find him."

"What has made you such a fool about Lerod?"

I told him of McFarland and of Snips and then:

"Lerod held my wife practically a prisoner for months. It isn't what he did or what he didn't do toward her. It is the fact that he is who he is and she is who she is."

Gaboreau noiselessly tapped the ends of his fingers together.

"Love, love," he said quietly. "I knew you were particularly dangerous tonight.

I didn't know why. There are many things I don't know. I know what Lerod will do when I tell him you are the striped bandit."

"When you tell him?"

"Yes, yes." He was still speaking quietly. "I shall tell him. It's war to the knife, you know. You have chosen."

Then he laughed as if mocking me, making sport of me.

"But Hearn," he went on. "What do you think Hearn will do? Probably shoot me. Think so? It would save you the trouble, Everhard. You've made your first threat tonight. You're going to kill me. Maybe Hearn will do it for you." He laughed again, cackling in a horrible way as if jeering at some invisible Dark Angel. "Hearn and I—he in his palace, I squatting here in the midst of a ragpicker's refuse—and Hearn and I partners! I have to hide. He has to hide. I shun the police. He shuns the public. I wonder what he will do when I tell him. I never met him. You—Everhard—I know what you will do every time I see you. You will sit there cursing yourself because you are not enough of a villain to shoot a poor old helpless man. But you won't shoot. You never will shoot me. But Hearn—kill Hearn first, Everhard. Lerod won't matter. He couldn't hit anybody when he was scared—and he will be paralyzed."

There was much that was arresting in those later words. I asked what he meant.

"War to the knife," was his vague reply, given with a curious twist of his lips.

I knew that it was hopeless to try to get out of Gaboreau information that he didn't want to give. I might have tried, anyway. But then there was the pound of running feet coming nearer through the tunnel. We listened. There was only one man running. I made to close the door, but Gaboreau said—

"Wait—let's see."

He had kept the door open because, unable to walk, it would have been an unusual effort for him to crawl across to open it when any one came.

Connolly burst in, excited. Detectives, he said, were searching for me. They thought I had gone up-stairs, but they were searching thoroughly. They might find, or some snitch might tell them, of the door that leads into the passage. They had been there some time, but he couldn't get away before.

I had evidently been followed by some of the detectives who were keeping a watch on Conrad Hearn's house. They, having seen me—without knowing who I was—go into the Hole, probably decided that it would be well to question me. Naturally the police would have been hesitant to stop anybody coming from Hearn's home until they had some better excuse than that for interrogating him. Coming to such a dive as the Hole would seem to offer a pretty good excuse for asking an explanation.

"Oh, well," said Gaboreau resignedly, "my work's done here. You go, Everhard. Joe will take care of me. Good boy, Joe. And," he called after me, "don't forget that we've declared war to the knife!"

What could one do when entangled with such a person as that man, half lunatic and wholly genius—genius, especially—in baffling and confusing me, at least—just when I had been most determined that I would not let him baffle me? All that I had found out was what I knew before—that I might expect anything from Gaboreau. He might strike when he thought I was not looking. He might throw himself forward to receive a bullet intended for me. Either would not be unlike him. I had noticed in him a certain weariness, a certain lack of zest, not wholly characteristic. He had been more quiet than seemed natural.

I made for my apartment. I was glad to look forward to a warm tub and a soft mattress. Gaboreau and Conrad Hearn and Lerod could make their plans, and I knew that I, being more or less implicated, was in the way to have a bad time getting out of them. But there is always some means of getting out of every corner, every hole, every difficulty. One can't conceive of a complication that can not be untangled, of a danger that is not escapable. That idea has often given me consolation. I was much less troubled than it may appear that I should have been.

XV

IT WAS after three o'clock when I put the key into the door of my apartment and stepped into a room that was very dark and still.

That the room remained dark gave me a moment of surprize. Ordinarily Yang Li pressed the button as soon as I stepped in.

It was quiet and still. I listened, for it seemed that I could hear some one breathing. I could.

I wondered if at last I had found Yang, the sleepless, in a doze.

I turned on the light.

There in a chair by the table, her hat on the floor, her head drooped wearily on her shoulder like a child too tired to wait for bed, sat Vivian.

I stood for some time, looking down at the poor tired girl who, like a bird of passage, beaten about in storm, had come back to where she knew was a welcome, sheltering nest. I was glad to see her. To say "glad" is to put it very reservedly. I was thrilled, and I am not often thrilled.

"But perhaps," I reflected, "she has come for help—not for love."

I suppose all women are alike to the men who love them. I can't, for myself, speak further than Vivian. One of the joys of her was that she was sure to do the unexpected, though rarely the displeasing. So far as my training both at the card table and elsewhere permitted, I did not show displeasure at anything she did. My ideas on the subject may be wrong, but they are mine—developed from an intense irritation to being corrected and checked myself. I do what I think is right, and I do not care to answer to other people for doing so.

Presently she stirred, shifted her eyes uneasily to avoid the light, twisted uncomfortably in the chair. Her elbow slipped from an arm of the chair, and she opened her eyes suddenly and sat up—looking straight at me. A confused moment of puzzling at where she was; then she sat erect—Vivian always sat and stood very erect—and demanded crossly, petulantly—

"Aren't you going to kiss me?"

Perhaps women are wise in rarely showing a humble attitude toward mere man. Even I at that moment could not resist the temptation to torment her a little.

"What can I do for you?" I said politely, ignoring the other question. I thought she deserved having a little suspense.

Her dark eyes stared up at me in studious puzzlement; a slight tremor played with her lower lip, and she hesitated between tears and anger. Then she compromised with the half indignant, half pathetic question—

"Are you looking for trouble?"

That was almost a stock phrase of jest between us—that sentence. As usual, I hastily protested.

"But, Miss Rublee," I added, "it is quite unusual for me to find women in my apartment—at this hour."

"Don, don't! Can't you see I want to cry? And you stand there like a beast and brute and won't let me. You just let me find any woman around this apartment at any hour and—and—and——"

"But, Miss Rublee——"

"Don't Miss Rublee me! I am Vivian Richmond, and——"

"But——"

"Nothing of the kind! I've wired a dozen lawyers to find flaws in that divorce. I want it wiped out. I want to know it was never granted. I said I'd give a bonus of five thousand dollars to the judge if he would discover he'd made a mistake."

"You did that by telegraph?"

"Of course. Think I want to wait for a letter to get there?"

"Bribery——"

"Bribery nothing. I just asked him to be broad-minded and recognize his mistake. It's being broad-minded I am. And you made a mistake in ever letting me get a divorce. Don, you're to blame for the whole thing! And I come and give you a chance to regret it and say you are sorry and—and— Don, I will cry!"

And she did.

I lifted her from the chair and sat down with her in my arms. She snuggled against me like a birdling that has fluttered back from the cold ground to the warm nest. We sat for some time, silent, happy.

Presently she lifted a wistful face and whispered:

"Don, don't you ever let me leave you again! I'll give you a written order to that effect. No matter how much I try to, don't you let me. I won't really want to go! You won't, will you?"

"What have you been into now?" I asked it just as if I was not far more aware of her troubles than perhaps even she was.

"Don, is it swearing," she whispered softly, "to say you have had a hell of a time—when you have?"

"What's been the matter?"

"Why haven't you looked after me? You know I always get into a horrid mess. I hate men! I loathe them! Beasts! I've only seen one gentleman in six months—and he was—was the terrible striped bandit!"

"Was he so terrible?"

"Terrible! He was a dear!"

"Really?"

"Yes. And like a fool—I am a fool, Don—I was afraid of him and ran off with another man. Henry Macree. You've heard of him? And he's so full of hatpins, I guess they think I thought he was a bug and tried to stick him on a cork!"

IN WHAT would have been incoherently, had I not known so much about her experiences already, Vivian told her story. One of the dearest things about Vivian was that she, so unconscious of what people might "think," did not defend or justify or gloss herself in the least. She frankly admitted that Lerod had fascinated her. That Macree seemed wonderful. That she had a glorious time—for a while. She told me that she had often hated me for being so cold, so reserved, so immobile, so calmly disagreeable. But she guessed—and was perhaps not far wrong—that men had to be either stone images or beasts; and that women had to be silly creatures who, like children, were fascinated by the danger of playing with a snake and bored by the security of a stone wall to which they came breathless in panic every time the snake coiled to strike.

Her experience with Macree is better suggested than told. A young fool, he was, who had known a lot of women—but none like Vivian. As many men do, he had thought her indebted to him beyond chance of protest because he had done a decent and perhaps gallant thing—in which luck assisted by bringing him to the curb at the psychological moment in front of the Klemscott.

"I came back where I belonged," she explained, looking around the apartment. "Yang wasn't going to let me in. I told him to get out and never come back; so he went in that room there and locked the door! It's all his fault, Don. I've telephoned you, but that Chinaman is stupid. I wanted you awfully bad the other night. I wanted Lerod to come in and find you there with me in the Klemscott! When I opened the door, some way I was sure it would be you. It seems like you always show up just when I've got to see you. And it was the striped bandit. I was almost as glad to see him. You'd like him, Don. He was just like you—not an eyelash trembled when all those men walked in with guns. Why do men all the time carry guns in their hands?"

"I did rather wonder what had become of you. I made some inquiries—but it seemed as if you had dropped off the ends of the earth."

"Don, I am through. I'm never going to get out again from right under your coat! That horrible Lerod—Don, I believe that he killed Gowan. I do."

"I know that he did."

She shuddered and clung tighter.

"How?" she whispered.

I told her, told her of the note that was found, of the visit to me made by the Secret Service man.

"What did you do?"

I asked what could I have done?

"You did something. I know you too well. Don—" with sudden fright and belief—"are you in more trouble?"

"Nothing more than that I have sent word to Lerod that he will probably be killed on sight."

"You never before threatened——"

"No. But I have made several since—threats. Gaboreau, too. I must be getting old and short-tempered. I'm beginning to think it is wrong to live with a gun in your hand—no matter how conscientious you may be in motives. Trouble becomes a kind of stimulant that you crave. I used to think I never found it—trouble, I mean—unless it crowded in upon me. But now, like a half-drunken gunman of the old West, I am looking for Lerod."

"Please, Don—don't! Let him alone. Let's go off some place. To Hawaii—Japan—any place. Canada. Let's go hunting in Canada. Just you and I and some funny-speaking Canuck guide. Let's start now—this minute!"

She had opened my vest and pushed the buttons aside because they pressed against her nestling head, and her fingers, in playing lovingly about my throat and neck, wandered lower and encountered something that the mere sense of touch could not explain. Then, with a "What's this?" and before I could—even had I wished greatly to do so—stop her, she had pulled out the folded opera hat that I, not knowing when my striped bandit disguise might be needed, carried under the right shoulder.

"What on earth?" she asked quickly,

studying the raised hat as it sat over her uplifted hand.

She clapped it on to my head and leaned back to study the effect. Then a half-smothered suspicion—

"Don—you——"

"Yes."

From a vest pocket I removed the silk mask and shook it out.

Most surprizingly, she broke into sobs and lay limply against my breast, her arms vise-like about my neck. I could not imagine what was the matter. I did not ask. One might as well talk to the rain as question a woman before she has had her cry out.

At last, not unattended with sighs and sobs and determined smiles and dripping cheeks—like an April day—she struck my nose repeatedly with a punitive forefinger and said:

"You—you—you— Oh, Don, I am such a silly little fool! I didn't blame you, but you don't know how it hurt me because you seemed to have forgotten me. I wondered about you—oh, lots of nights. I said, 'Oh, well, he's forgotten me—so it don't make any difference what I do! Or where I am.' And to think I didn't recognize you—my own husband! But, Don, you'll get arrested!"

"Hardly—unless you tell. You and Jerry—maybe Yang—no one can ever tell what a Chinaman knows—are the only ones who know it. I'll take that back; Gaboreau does too. But then, Gaboreau would not tell the police anything."

Which, I may here remark, shows how very little, after all my experiences with him, I knew of Antoine Gaboreau!

"Now, sir," she said, grasping an ear in either hand, "you are in my power. You love me, or I'll go up on the housetop and scream, 'Don Everhard Richmond is the striped bandit—Don Everhard Richmond is the striped bandit!' "

"And land in an asylum. If that Reno judge doesn't put you in jail."

"For offering him five thousand dollars to be broad-minded! No, no."

"An easier way out of it than that will be to get married all over again."

"No, sir! I won't admit that there was a tiny, wee fragment of a second when you were not my husband! Why, if there were really a divorce, you might have married somebody else! Don, you are like a great big dynamo—you can hardly tell when it is running or when it is standing still. It looks stupid and calm—and yet it just oozes shocks and bumps for anybody that touches it! The striped bandit! And I used to lie awake wondering how you acted when he held up the Phoenix! And that funny thick speech. Now I remember how you spoke to those policemen when you told them to put their hands up! Oh, Don, you deceived me. It's wrong to deceive women—especially those that are your wives. But I suppose all men do. I hate men—beasts! But dynamos—you can turn 'em on and off with a button, like lights."

WE TALKED, or rather Vivian talked, on and on. Dawn crept over the city. The air grew more chilly. I turned on the electric radiator—a special meter registered the amount of juice I burned; so the apartment house had no objections to my electric apparatus—and shifted Vivian to the other knee.

I wonder, do men ever grow too old and hardened to feel the Springlike joy of love? Certainly what I had gone through almost from childhood had left me beyond, or almost beyond, the possibility of excitement. I was like a man to whom wines were flavorless because he had had a lifetime of raw brandy. Only the lips of Vivian seemed to stir emotion within me. God, but it is a terrible thing to put all that is worth while of life into the fragile, fluttering, capricious hands of a woman! And yet it is more terrible not to have life's values in the keeping of some woman. Ask the heart-hungry, the disillusioned, the cynical, the misogynistic, whether wisdom is really worth the folly of believing in a woman?

At eight o'clock Yang imperturbably came out with coffee, buttered toast, eggs and sugar-cured ham on a tray for two. He bowed very low, adjusted the table and set it.

"Yang Li, you are a dear!" Vivian exclaimed with impetuous pardon.

He smiled the quick, enigmatic smile of the Orient and placed his forehead nearly to the floor. As he did so, the long, razor-like blade that lurked in his left sleeve fell, handle first, and lay at Vivian's feet.

She gave a little scream; "raw" steel made her nervous. She associated Yang with that murderous knife, anyway.

"Oh, I hate that knife! Why do you

carry it, Yang? Throw it away. Get rid of it. I can't stand it. You know I can't! Don, tell him to get rid of it. I won't stay in this house if you don't."

Yang had, or thought he had, as much attachment to that knife as to his arm. At some time or other his tongue had been cut out as a terrible reminder that he had seen things of which he was never to speak. Some affair of secret brotherhoods in China had caught Yang Li, and later a tong war in San Francisco had left him in need of a place to retire. In some five years of intimate relationship I had come to regard Yang much as he regarded his knife. He was sinister, deadly, enigmatic, but trustworthy as cold steel.

It was nothing new for Vivian to protest against Yang, to scold him. He picked up the knife and shuffled out noiselessly; that is, his movements were the shuffling gait of the Chinaman, but one saw rather than heard that.

Ten seconds later she had forgotten Yang and his knife. She ran into the next room and splashed her face in chilly water, returning bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked to the "wedding" breakfast. We talked as we ate and hurriedly finished to go "across the river" in search of license and a justice and so obliterate the longest year in the life of either of us.

It was late in the afternoon when we returned. Both were tired, worn out with sleeplessness and strain. But I forgot all about sleep and strain as I came through my apartment door. I came through first and alone, for I had pushed Vivian back with a gesture to remain outside. And I found—well, on the table I found a note from Gaboreau, and on the floor I found five men sitting in attitudes of more or less discomfort.

Four of them were officers of the law, municipal and Federal, and they had their hands tied behind them and their feet tied before. Before them sat the imperturbable, inscrutable Yang, with his long razor blade nestling across his forearm and his wicked little eyes gazing in meditative emptiness at the wall above their heads.

Brown of the Secret Service was there; Perkins of Headquarters, with his arm in a bandage; Perkins' partner, a fellow named Willis; and a policeman in uniform, Clauson.

Jerry Kelly, my chauffeur, sat across the room, his feet cocked on a radiator, a huge Colt in his lap and an improvised cuspidor at his side.

No one said anything for countable minutes. I had been in some tight places, but here was the tightest, though my "enemies" were trussed at my feet. I had always fought crooks, not the police. Kill a crook, injure him, offend him, and at most there is only his gang to settle with. Sweep up a handful of friendly ruffians, a sudden surprize, the flash of guns and quick blows of shimmering steel, then a scurry into darkness—and your blood-hunting gang is quiescent for all time. But—I use the ultimate word—kill a policeman, kill a hundred, kill a thousand if you can; and, for each that drops, ten will take his place and press on. That is why the police—with all their faults—can never be eliminated as a power until society itself becomes anarchistic and lawless.

That was not why I was no crook—no out-and-out law-breaker. But that is why I would have been no out-and-out law-breaker if I had had other views than those I did have. And there I was, apparently irretrievably exposed to and entangled with not only the police but also the Federal service.

What could I say? What could I do? Nothing intelligently explanatory or rectifying.

To tell these men that it had been a mistake, to release them then and there, would be like telling a tiger caught by accident that there had been a mistake and asking him to please go his way and leave me to go mine.

To undertake to dispose of them, to keep them, to do anything with them except turn them loose, was equally out of the question.

And there on the table lay Gaboreau's note, strangely direct:

> Everhard, be at Hearn's at 11:35. Don't fail me; don't fail me! This is the last chapter. Think of me as what I might have been—and come. G.

There was something inexpressibly pathetic—like Satan in sorrow—to me in that sentence, "Think of me as what I might have been." For Gaboreau had the brilliant mind, the daring will, the deep, deep piercing insight to have been one of the world geniuses in any work, as he had been in crime.

The way he had lashed out with thrust on thrust and exterminated—not merely disrupted and captured, but exterminated—the Kaiser's spy crowd in early war days had been a tremendous feat. He had shown in that attack the essentially French subtility, patience and culminating audacity that, in a more vast and momentous way, had suddenly revealed Foch as the master-mind of war. "Think of me as what I might have been!" It was as a cry from the bottomless pit of one, now with broken wings, who had once challenged the arch-angels.

I have failed almost essentially in this narrative if I have not succeeded in conveying the fact that Gaboreau had, in spite of everything he did and seemed to be, touched me strangely. I will not minimize his evilness. It knew no limit until his ends were attained. He cut his course as a scythe-chariot, warrior-driven, cuts through the mob. And yet—well, there were limits, too. That scythe-chariot, so to speak, had once grazed my legs. The injury was unintentional, impersonal. I had merely stood in his way. But I objected to being driven down even impersonally, and, no matter how Gaboreau may have explained it to himself, the fact remained that I had made things uncomfortable for him.

But we had seemed to be inexplicably alike in this: He was always threatening to kill me, as I really believed he meant to do, but, when the opportunity came, he would say "Not yet" and give me chance to escape. I had determined time and again that, cripple or no cripple, I would be through with him. And yet face to face I would sit, as he said, cursing myself because I could not screw up determination to treat him as I would have treated any other in his place.

That was essentially the aspect in our relation before my harum-scarum nephew had married his war-refugee niece. After that for a time our relations appeared to be more—not friendly, but less hostile. My bungling attempt to get him into an asylum where he belonged had made him really bitter, though he seemed to have confined his bitterness to threats, as a dog, preoccupied with a bone, growls at some intruder in the background. Gaboreau's bone had been his war-maps.

The rest has been related with some detail. I understood the things I have set down no better than any one else. I have put them down just as they seemed to me—and with particular fidelity to his own phraseology.

Now he asked me to think of him as what he might have been and not to fail him at 11:35 P.M. in the house of Conrad Hearn.

THERE was I with that irresistible request, no sleep for two days—and another bedless night before me—and four officers—with the majesty of the city and the Federal Government behind them. To somebody I would have to render an accounting in full.

It looked as if a malicious Fate were trying to drive me irrevocably into the arms of Conrad Hearn. He and Gaboreau—and perhaps they alone—could extricate me from such complication.

Otherwise, the only recourse I could think of was to grab up Vivian, Jerry and Yang and flee—taking advantage of what start I might have between the time we bolted and these prisoners were discovered. But, for one thing, that would lead to permanent outlawry. For another, I have never run away from trouble. It is not courage so much as fatalism. One who gambles has faith in the fall of the cards: he plays his hand as best he can but abides by the decision. Riches or ruin, he learns to accept either imperturbably and bluff clear to the show-down.

"Well," said Jerry, slowly taking his feet from the radiator and throwing the tobacco from his mouth, " 'gins to look like old times, Mr. Everhard."

"Yes, yes," I said slowly, scrutinizing each man in turn, "but I never thought that they could get so many officers in their pay. Of course, I more or less suspected that one there—" I indicated Perkins—"of being either stupid or a crook, but the others— Yet, of course, that mysterious Unknown had officers in his pay——"

It was a desperate and rather pathetic effort to confuse those four unpurchasable and honest officers.

They began a violent protest, all talking at once, until the swift gleam of Yang's knife threateningly passed before their eyes. Silence—abrupt as if hands had gripped their throats—followed.

"Of course," I went on, "that's what

you have to say—that you are not crooks. That's where the value of your stars and uniforms comes in—to keep you from being suspected. That's what the Unknown pays for—stars and uniforms. And, of course, I understand perfectly why you are willing to call it a mistake and agree to drop the matter until you get a better opportunity to strike at me."

"Don't you believe that for a minute—that dropping the matter," said Brown of the Secret Service.

"——, no!" shouted Perkins, indifferent to Yang's threatening eyes.

"Oh, yes, gentlemen. I understand—perfectly. You are clever, all of you. We'll have an investigation, a thorough one. And if you have been mere blunderers—well, perhaps your apology will be sufficient."

Vaguely but desperately I was trying to arrange to take advantage not so much of my friendship with Burgess as of the fact that I had been more or less commissioned by him to play the game with Conrad Hearn. That was the sole straw that floated on my sea of troubles—a very slight and untrustworthy straw, too.

"Apologize be ——"

But the point of Yang's knife flashed close enough to check the irate Perkins.

Vivian was standing in the hall, hearing, seeing but unseen and fearful. I didn't want Brown to see her. He would recognize her as the woman whom the striped bandit had helped escape from the Klemscott. So would Burgess if ill luck threw them face to face.

An idiotic rhyme about the world being so full of a number of things that we should all be happy as kings kept, with exasperating persistency, recurring to my mind. The world was so full of a number of things that left me about as happy as a king in a revolutionary country that perhaps some ironically inclined brain cells at the back of my head kept thrusting that jingle forward with a perverted sense of appropriateness.

I got Vivian into Mrs. Kelly's apartment next door and told her to stay there—not even to peek—until I came again. When that would be, I did not know.

I simply could not throw down my cards even to Burgess, much less to these men, and explain who I was and what I had tried to do. An enormous amount of loot, gathered by the striped bandit, neatly done into packages and addressed to names the owners had given me when I took the stuff, was in the next room. It would have required clairvoyance, not eloquence or argument, to have convinced a policeman that I had been, under any circumstances, justified in doing as I had done. It would have been unthinkable to confide that detail to even Burgess.

But there is always a way out—there is always a way out. Circumstances are always kaleidoscopic—never stationary. They shift with the ticking seconds.

It appeared that that man Willis, who had shadowed me the night before from Hearn's to the Hole, had recognized me, or thought he had, as the "notorious" Everhard. He had confided to Brown, who was also on the job. My appearance tallied so with the description Perkins had given of the man who shot him that an investigation was determined on. They had come to my apartment, picking up a patrolman on the way. It was not difficult to learn where the notorious Everhard lived. They had made the mistake, however, of inquiring of the apartment next door—of Jerry Kelly—about my movements and if anything suspicious had been noticed.

Jerry had been, as he called it, on my "staff" too long to be in doubt as to the proper course to take. That these men were officers rather added to the zest of one who for many years had been obliged to keep his coat-tails drawn close about him while dodging officers. The pursuit had been that close.

Jerry had explained to them that he was sure they could take a look about in the apartment if they wished, but that there was a crazy Chinaman in there it would be well to look out for.

"I know 'im well. I'll go tell 'im some friends is come to have a surprize party. Jest wait."

They waited. Jerry whispered to Yang. Jerry threw open the door and invited the four officers in. The door closed. The officers, caught unprepared, faced a glittering knife, a wicked Chinaman and a Colt that looked big enough to swallow an ordinary man. The very desperateness of the thing made it successful.

And, having trussed his four prizes and set them neatly in a row with backs to the wall, with Yang cross-legged before them to check the incentive to talk or cry out, Jerry complacently reposited his feet on the radiator to await my return.

What else should he have done? Try to allay their suspicions and make them more so—make them guess that he, too, was an accomplice? Let them into that apartment where he knew the striped bandit loot was stored?

If the Lord wants people who use their heads, whom he can trust and who hesitate not at all at danger, there will be a privately spoken word to Saint Peter when Jerry's burly ghost casts a speculative eye on the chances of "cracking" the heavenly gates. There are people who would have given a million dollars a year for such loyalty as Jerry showered on me for the mere pittance of apartment rent.

IN THE comprehensive language of the street, I was up against it—hard.

What if these officers had confided with others as to where they were going and what for? That was not likely. Officers out to make a coup do not tell more than they can help—until afterward. The patrolman would be missed when he neglected to ring in. But a search only by accident could find witnesses enough to point the way to my apartment.

First, no matter what twist the future might take, I had to get rid of every trace connecting me with the striped bandit—at least in that apartment. Nor could I afford to let these men realize that anything was being taken out of the apartment.

I told them that I did not care to hear any explanations from them at this time; that we would go into the matter thoroughly; and, if they could give a good accounting and proofs of blundering instead of such intent as I suspected them of, then they would be turned loose. But in the meantime they must expect to endure certain inconveniences. One of which was that of spending the night in my bathroom—for just then I had some work to do, and their presence would be disturbing.

Into the bathroom they went, and after them, as custodian, went Yang Li.

With them out of the way, Jerry and I stood looking at each other for a minute.

"Well, when you get out of sight of land, Jerry, it doesn't make much difference whether the water's ten feet deep—or a thousand fathoms. No land in sight for us." And I added quickly, congratulatory, "If you had done anything different than you did, both of us would probably now be in jail."

"Me go t' jail?" Jerry demanded. "Not by a —— sight! I'll go to the morgue first!"

He meant it. He loved that little girl wife of his. She believed him thoroughly honest. The morgue was better than to have her weeping through the bars.

I realized then, as I had not realized before, that I was as ruthless, as cruel, as inhuman almost as Gaboreau had ever been. For I alone had pulled Jerry back into what, for all the good his actual innocence did him, was crime. For all the good that my guiltless intentions did me, too. Discovery of his guilt would mean blood, tragedy, death.

Some way it was borne in no to me then that, in spite of all I had thought, there was something bigger than doing what one thought was right—without considering the troubles it might entail. That is, doing right alone, without the sanction of laws—of even the muddle-headed police. There is no man big enough, wise enough, honest enough to stand alone and scorn society and its conventions. I had always fought my own way out—rather careless of who got hurt—because I believed that I was doing what any honest, intelligent man would approve. But for once I began to feel that methods as well as ends must be reckoned with.

However, I was too far in, too stubborn, perhaps, to make an about face when confronted with the most perplexing—and dangerous—fight of my life. I was going through with it.

First, the loot had to be got out. That was not so simple as it might appear. It is disposing of the loot that trips most robbers; it is hiding the body that reveals most of the cunning murderers. I was embarrassed because I wanted this loot to be returned to its owners and had always intended that it should be. It was done into parcels and addressed; but, had it been discovered, the police would have declared that was merely my cunning foresight to make a defense. If I had intended to return it, why had I not done so before? It is awfully hard to get anything through the head of a policeman. I did not have sufficient, or anything like sufficient, postage to dispatch those parcels. I couldn't go out and buy enough stamps—at that time of night—without wandering from one stamp-slot machine and drug-store to others all over the city. Besides, how was the loot to be carried out of the apartment house? There was almost a trunkful of it.

In such difficulties the simplest measures are always the wisest; and mine were very simple—after I thought of it, although I suspect that some people will think I made a mountain out of a mole-hill. But did they ever try to get rid of anything? It seems easy to cast a paper of rubbish aside—but supposing it is vitally important that no one should examine that paper? Burn it, and ashes remain. Throw the ashes to the wind—some one sees the action, remembers and at the first rumor about you reports. Cast it carelessly into the garbage can—garbage collectors are the most curious, searching folk on earth. They are always expecting to find a certified bearer check for a million dollars or a bag of diamonds. They came near finding something of the kind.

I took my trunk, a good one, and soon gave it such usage and ripping as made it look disreputable and ready for the discard. I threw the loot pell-mell into it. Over this I threw crumpled newspapers, magazines no longer worth saving, disfigured a book or two, swept up some lint and dust and threw it on top and gave the trunkful of stuff the appearance of rubbish. Then I got the janitor on the phone and wanted to know why he hadn't taken that trunk of rubbish out.

Of course, he hadn't known there was any trunk of rubbish to go down. He hadn't got the message before. He promptly took it down and left it in the furnace room with other burnable rubbish. Jerry later stole it—putting the parcels into two gunny sacks, refilling the trunk with rubbish at hand—loaded the parcels into the machine and, having switched the numbers on the car, drove around and distributed the parcels in various mail-boxes made for receiving packages. There was no postage on them, but notification of postage due, or, eventually, the post-office inspectors, would convey them to their owners.

Anyway, I had succeeded in getting the stuff clear of my hands without doing anything that could arouse suspicion in any one excepting possibly the janitor—if the police should question him. But how would the police suspect there had been anything removed unless somebody called their attention to the fact? Or unless I should be arrested—as I did not intend to be—and people began to remember this, that and something else? The janitor might remember all he pleased, but the chances were that he would have burned the stuff out of the trunk without ever noticing or being able to know that it was rubbish gathered from other apartments.

I recite all that in detail largely because some people have said luck kept me from being caught and suspected in various affairs.

It may be worth while to remark here, also, that, when fishing out the parcels from the furnace room, Jerry placed a bundle in the fire. The bundle contained a striped coat, an opera hat, a white silk mask. The heavy ring I always wore with the costume was flung into the street for the fortune of the first passer-by that caught its glint.

While Jerry was out dumping his parcels, I took an hour's sleep and awakened to drink a pint of black coffee.

Vivian and I had a little talk, which on her part was mostly tears. She said that she felt something terrible was going to happen. She had often felt that way—and the terrible usually happened, too. Not that any unusual psychic sense warned her; she knew for the most part, whenever I was in such an affair as the one at present, that the only way out was by beating dangerous men. Besides, like most women when happiness is within grasp of their fingers, she was apprehensive that Life would be a cruel enough dramatist to plunge her into tragedy. There probably never was a bride but felt that something tragic was going to happen simply because she was so happy. And Vivian was even more bride-like than the first time we were married.

Jerry I left in my apartment, partly because he didn't feel that Yang—the "Chink," as he contemptuously called him—was sure to be equal to the emergencies of warder, but largely because I was sure to be able to reach him by telephone and deliver whatever message might be necessary without alarming either Vivian or Mrs. Kelly. For Jerry to have driven up to Conrad Hearn's house would have been to invite further attention from the detectives lurking there.

Conrad Hearn, being who he was, was far too important for detectives to annoy by pressing attention beyond his doors. But they could watch, suspect, follow and make reports about whoever came and went. I believed that the only police officers who suspected me or who might recognize me—though I was not wholly unknown by sight, as events had shown—were locked up in my bathroom.

So it was best for Jerry to keep away. It was best for me to keep a coat-collar turned up and a hat pulled low as I got from the taxi and hurried to the door. I did those things. And, though I did look about me, I saw no one that I could have felt certain was a detective. Of people, a few were passing on foot and in machines. That was all. The street was really quiet—respectable indeed, while between the walls of that house which the detectives respected as a sanctuary there dwelt a man who was planning crime on a scale larger than could ever have been planned before.

Hearn had probably what was the greatest financial influence that any man had ever had or would have again, for the economic order was changing. Men might always grow rich, but they were no longer growing insolent of laws—no more daring to be ruthless in finance. Supposing a Harriman, with his genius for organization, his vast wealth, his fearful audacity, had suddenly in the early part of the century undertaken to do what Conrad Hearn almost twenty years later was to try in crime. Well, Hearn had as much genius for organization, more wealth, as much audacity. But, between Harriman's day and Hearn's, capitalists had dropped a curtain between the public and their stage. They were as successful but not so sensational.

But times were changing. The Government had begun the control of what went on behind that curtain of secrecy. Hearn was determined to restore the good old days when plutocrats could do as they pleased and answer to no law. Crime, crime nation-wide, red and blood-soaked, was so to distract and harass the country that attention would be diverted from him and such as he. The plan was folly. It had never a chance of attaining its end, but it was dangerous—terribly so.

XVI

AT THE time I was surprized and not a little irritated at Gaboreau's assurance—his cock-sureness that I would do precisely as he expected; however, the test of a man's ability is not in planning but in succeeding. And I fell into Gaboreau's plans just as if I had known the part all along and been rehearsed for it.

Hugo had opened the door quietly and with a heavy finger to his thick lips that suggested silence.

He handed me a note from Gaboreau. It said nothing more than:

> Wait your cue, Ev[illegible]hard. G.

Hugo darted up the stairs and signed for me to follow quietly. I did so.

It appeared that Hearn had got rid of the nurses and of every one else. I met no one, heard no one until we stopped before Hearn's room. Voices were inside.

Hugo knocked and, being told to come in, did so and delivered the most astounding message conceivable.

He said Mr. Everhard had just sent word that he couldn't come.

My impulse was to step in and give the lie to the negro then and there.

"What on earth?" Hearn asked from his bed, looking from Hugo to Gaboreau.

I could see plainly. The hall was dark; the door was not quite closed. I could see and hear. Gaboreau's back was to me, and he was between me and Lerod, who sat close to the bedside of Hearn.

"Can't tell about Everhard—can't tell about him!" Gaboreau exclaimed.

"I knew he'd lay down—the dog!"

That came from Lerod. The fellow was certainly determined to kick his heels at heaven.

"Is he coming later?" Hearn asked of the negro.

Hugo replied that I had not said. No one seeming to have anything more to say to him, he left the room and came out, closing the door—closing it, yet—artfully if by intention, luckily if by accident—not fastening it. The door noiselessly edged open for two or three inches.

I laid a questioning hand on Hugo, and

with an authoritative, presumptuous gesture he almost tapped my lips to signify silence and gently urged me closer to the door.

I looked through and listened for a moment. Then I turned. Hugo was gone. I was alone. Yet I knew very well that Gaboreau was aware that I was there, just outside of that door. The order to wait for my cue became intelligible, became more and more intelligible until the full significance shot like a flash of lightning across my brain. Gaboreau the Terrible had risen to the full height of even his audacity, had exhausted the resources of even his amazing ingenuity.

"A dog? Hunh?" he said to Lerod. "How would you like for Everhard to hear you say that?"

"I don't care what he hears. I tell you, he has thrown us over. Look at the chance I took to slip in here tonight! They're after me. I don't know why. Felise—looks like they'd caught her. And, —— her, she'd squeal. All women will."

It seemed that Burgess, with one of those strokes that are so surprizing in the police because so rare, had managed to keep information about Felise's arrest from getting out.

"We can smash the police," said Hearn with careless authority. "But what of Everhard? Why couldn't he come? Did you tell him this was to be important?"

"Important," Gaboreau replied. "I said, 'Important.' Yes. The most important night of his life. Mine, too; the same for each of us. Ever read the Bible, Hearn?" There was an audacious familiarity in speaking to Conrad Hearn as Gaboreau was speaking to him. "Great book. Entertaining."

"Oh, to —— with the Bible," said Lerod. "We're in a mess. Everhard's laid down. Bet he's sold us out to the police."

"No," said Gaboreau. "I'm the one that's sold you out. Everhard hasn't courage enough. He'd be afraid that his conscience might trouble him. Me—I have no conscience. But the Bible, Hearn. Great book. Samson's my favorite character. Look at me—withered skin and wasted bones and broken muscles! Samson, big giant."

I could not, as I have said, see Gaboreau's face. I could see the faces of the others. But it was Gaboreau that interested me. He was continually dipping his hand into his pocket and nervously fingering something. Nervously he would remove his fingers and carelessly scatter something about him. It looked like snuff—but he did not use it.

Lerod noticed, too, and asked whatever was he doing.

"Dynamite—dynamite," Gaboreau answered carelessly. "—— it! Don't you know I have to keep something in my pocket to scatter. I'm all nerves. Some men tear paper into bits. But, speaking of Everhard——"

He was hurrying them from the subject of the powder-like stuff. Had they known Gaboreau as well as I did, or in the same way that I knew him, they would not have let him distract their attention from that powder until they investigated. Gaboreau wouldn't have been nervous on a gibbet. I never knew of a man who had so much design for what he said and for every move that he made as this man who spoke and acted continually as if he scarcely knew what he was about.

"Speaking of Everhard," he said, "do you know that fellow is a student of black magic? Yes, a wizard. That's why people can't catch him. He's called a dead shot. He doesn't aim when he shoots—devils guide his bullets. He can vanish—just disappear in thin air."

"Nonsense!" said Hearn, exasperated.

"Ask Lerod there——"

"There is something queer about him," Lerod admitted. "But black magic is bunk."

"Is it?" Gaboreau demanded. "You don't believe in devils?"

Conrad Hearn was looking half angry and wholly puzzled at this curious wisp of a man, this wreck of a man, who was supposed to be the most daring and successful criminal on earth. Men of business are inclined to think every one a fool who does not talk and act with the dignity and directness of magnates around a table.

"LISTEN," said Gaboreau as with a gesture of finality he strewed a whole handful of powder on to the floor. Raising his voice, he cried: "Hear me through. By the name of the name of God, I'll tell you something that will shake the shoes off your feet! You, Lerod—" and

Gaboreau's tongue whipped out a succession of the vilest words that one man can throw at another—"have played with fire without ever knowing that you were lighting your funeral pyre. And you, Hearn—you are the biggest dupe that ever put out his eyes so you wouldn't see intelligence in anybody else!"

Lerod jerked out a gun, leveling it. Hearn straightened in his bed, livid with anger. He was being mocked, insulted, verbally bashed about by a lunatic.

"Now, by ——," Gaboreau cried, "having got your attention, I'll tell you something. And you can know this, Hearn: if Lerod shoots before I finish, it will be because he doesn't want you to hear the truth!"

Lerod lowered his gun, mumbling something indistinct. Gaboreau had bluffed him.

"What in the name of heaven are you talking about!" demanded Hearn.

"Nothing in the name of heaven!" Gaboreau had lashed himself into a dramatic fury.

He was as conscious of his rôle as ever a Shakespearian actor, down center, crying, "Into the breach!"

"Heaven? What have you and I, Hearn, and that malformed son of a skunk there to do with heaven?"

Lerod cursed an accompaniment to Gaboreau's words, but Gaboreau did not appear to notice. However, I watched Lerod, and both my guns were in my hands.

"Lerod," he said, speaking directly, "do you know why—why—why—with all your repeated and insistent tips directed to the Secret Service, this poor old cripple was not arrested? You knew where he was. You sent word day after day where he was. You yellow snitch! You were afraid to come and get him yourself—but you told men down at Washington where they could find poor old Gaboreau. Didn't you?"

"No, no," Lerod lied.

"Of course you didn't. And, when they paid no attention to your tips—you were —— careful to keep out of sight yourself—you put forward that stool-pigeon to plead guilty to the assassination of Senator Rawlins and confess that Gaboreau—Gaboreau, mind you—had got him to do it!

"Then I had to jump. Too many people knew who old Gaboreau was and where he was. It would have been a scandal to the Secret Service and police not to have arrested me. You were in that, too, Hearn!"

"No," said Hearn.

"Don't lie to me—it's past the time for lies!"

Even I shivered at the audacity of speaking so to Hearn. Gaboreau knew they could have shot him, no matter how much he may have counted on my protecting him. He knew that, sitting between them and me, he was in line of fire. But he knew more than that. He knew they would not shoot, that no man would have shot, until he had finished with such a startling confession as seemed coming from him.

"Listen, you fools—" he was maliciously tormenting them into spasms of fury—"did you ever hear of German spies? Well, poor old Gaboreau put a bomb under a spy nest, and certain men down at Washington unofficially sent word to him that he had done something frightfully illegal and that they would probably have to arrest him on suspicion if he didn't change his name and keep quiet. They said unfortunately they didn't have any proofs that Gaboreau had done that thing—that Gaboreau and a fellow named Everhard had done that thing. Yes, mark you, Everhard was there. And, mark you, he shot with devils behind his bullets. And the men at Washington said what had been done was unforgivable—but they were very grateful!

"Then what did I do? I, Gaboreau, wrote a letter. Out of thirty years of successful crime, I wrote a letter—and I put into that letter the why and wherefore that crime would never, could never, be effectively checked in this or any other country until municipal police systems were merged into the Federal service!"

It may be imagined that I was as much surprized as any one who heard that astounding confession. In fact, I did not believe it. And I could not, even by the most desperate conjecture, imagine why Gaboreau was so recklessly inviting himself to be murdered!

"You did not!" Lerod exclaimed, more to convince himself than to deny Gaboreau.

Hearn glared, fascinated, incredulous. His hand was under his pillow. When he was convinced, he would bring that hand out—and shoot.

Gaboreau had given me some credit for

the attack on the spy nest; but I deserved none. It was he who had wiped it out. I had blundered in, thinking that he, himself, was the Kaiser's agent, and in that way had got into the affair. True, when I understood the situation, I had shot once or twice—and not missed.

"Copies of that letter were given to various congressmen. No one but a certain man who has a gift for silence knew from whom it had come. But the arguments were obvious. They went home to some of the men of Congress——"

"Did you do that?" Hearn asked it, his forehead contracted, his eyes staring hard, as if passing—as he was—judgment of death.

"No," said Gaboreau with a careless fling of a hand and change in his voice; "I am only telling you what I might have done!"

And I, more than any man who heard him, did not know which statement to believe.

He went on rapidly:

"Then you and Lerod made a combination and started to be crooks on a grand scale. Don't you know it takes brains to be a crook? Not money. Not a readiness to shoot somebody or use a knife. Not invisible political pressure to pry fools out of jail. Brains—like mine!"

"Get over this foolishness!" Hearn shouted, restless, uneasy.

"You lie down there, Hearn. If we're all going to be devils together—study black magic—we want to start with a clean slate! I'm going to give a demonstration in black magic—and show you how a cripple can slay Samson!

"Listen," he screamed. "I didn't care anything about what you and Lerod did. I didn't even know who was doing it. I was no policeman. All I wanted was to be let alone. I had written that letter on the impulse of the minute. I put into it the conclusions of thirty years of study—for, when you plan how to beat a man, how to beat a group of men, how to beat a nation's police, you have to discover just how they can beat you. You have to know that and keep it in mind. You can always be beaten, and, if you don't know why or how, you are due for a fall! Understand me, Hearn?"

The veteran of ten score financial battles did understand. Here was wisdom that he understood. It came home to him with sudden emphasis. Perhaps after all this madman was as brilliant as had been reported.

HEARN nodded. Of course, he understood that way of fighting a campaign, though perhaps he had never thought of it in connection with crime—that is, beyond merely figuring out certain phases of beating and baffling the police. Certainly he had never recognized the ultimate, the inevitable, weakness in crime organization, as Gaboreau had been audacious enough to do.

"This man at Washington asked me again and again if I had any suggestions to offer. I had none. I said so. I was busy—France was fighting, and what were little wars between crooks and police? I was through with crooks and crime. Tired, not reformed. I cared nothing about the police and their troubles. I did care something about the nation and its future when I wrote my letter that stirred up Congress. Did you ever hear of a letter stirring up Congress before? No. It takes brains. You have to have something to say. I did say to them: 'Since this Unknown fool robs jails, get some agent of yours into jail—but don't let more than three people—yourself and your agent—know it, or the plan will fail.' It did fail. You cut Gowan McFarland's throat yourself, didn't you, Lerod?"

Lerod cursed, and his hand twitched nervously around the butt of his revolver.

Then said Gaboreau, destroying at one phrase—or at least causing it for a time to vanish—all the suspicion he had aroused against himself:

"Good work! That's the only way to do with spies and traitors!"

"Gaboreau," Hearn interrupted fiercely, puzzled, "what are you driving at?"

"Cleaning the slate, Hearn. Cleaning the slate so we'll know where to start. I'm leading up to Everhard and black magic—and Samson. Ever hear of Samson?

"Well, Lerod, you forced the attack on me into the open. I jumped. I didn't know you were behind all that crime wave until I saw your hand trying to connect me with the murder of congressmen. I knew it then. All I had to do was to find out who was behind you.

"And you, Hearn—you know how I

forced you to pay attention to me. Through the striped bandit——"

"Yes; who is that fellow?"

"Who is he?"

Both Hearn and Lerod were suddenly reminded of their interest in that.

I waited tensely. Would Gaboreau dare tell them?

"The striped bandit? Oh, he was a fellow who was curious to see who was behind all this crime, too. I'll tell you of him in a minute—but Lerod—Lerod may be interested to know that the mysterious woman he dangled from his hand for so long was—was—the wife of Everhard!"

Had there been an explosion in the room, the two men who heard could not have been more surprized.

As for me, I began to see what Gaboreau was doing. He had set the stage for tragedy. He was saying such things as he knew would force me to come into the room—such things as would force those men to try to kill me the moment that I did come into the room. If I slunk away and out of the house—ran—Hearn and Lerod would consecrate themselves to hounding me down. I had no intention of running.

I thought Gaboreau was lying about his letter to the Secret Service—he was a dramatic liar—but I understood his constant reference to Samson. He was determined to pull down Lerod, Hearn and myself, though he buried himself in the ruins. Gaboreau was not the sort of a man to commit suicide—not even for the sake of a dramatic effect. And he was certainly setting the stage for what could scarcely help being his own murder.

No matter what he might say, he could with a careless gesture and a change of voice make Hearn and Lerod doubt its truth. But, the minute I came through that door, they would know that all that he had said was true, and they would have to begin shooting. Gaboreau knew it.

"Now," he screamed, "you fools have been double-crossed and bluffed at every turn. Everhard and I won't let anybody else have a rival crime organization. No. We work together! Everhard is the striped bandit. He is the man that shot you, Hearn! He will kill you now! And you, Lerod—you don't believe in magic! Hear, you fools, I am Everhard! Everhard! Appear! Appear!"

As I have told it, this may sound like idiocy. I can convey nothing of the fearfully tense situation, of the dramatic timbre in the voice of Gaboreau, who held those men fascinated with his mingling of confession, black magic, threats! Audacity could simply not have conceived of anything above it. For, as he cried out, unmistakably summoning me—and yet to the ears of those other men seeming to summon a devil out of thin air—a lighted match fell from his fingers to the floor—where he had scattered flash powder.

A blinding, suffocating puff of smoke—certainly like the work of the devil—filled the room. Lerod cursed in amazed, shaken horror. Even Hearn cried out. And, as the smoke lifted, sifting about the room in a thinning fog-like haze, I was standing inside the door. Gaboreau had vanished. Not even I had seen him go or where he went. He had scuttled away, crawling, broken-backed, to wherever he had planned his exit. It was not hard to discover that, for the smoke was sucked as by a draft through the open window. Gaboreau had spoken to me of a ladder against the window, of Hugo listening there.

I did not look toward the window. I looked toward the two men. There was an incredulous horror on their faces. Both saw the empty chair where Gaboreau but ten seconds before had sat before they saw me. I noticed Hearn's eyes following the drift of smoke to the windows at the same time that Lerod realized I was there in the room. He screamed in a kind of inarticulate fear and, frantically pushing over the table, scattering papers, glasses and bottles, crouched behind it and thrust a gun blindly from around the side.

So close together that the separate reports mingled into one ragged roar, four guns were fired. Lerod shot, Hearn shot, and I shot from both hands. A glance, too late to have checked me, disclosed that Hearn, leaning far out of his bed, had not aimed at me. Perhaps he had not seen me. He fired at the window. He fired only once—and plunged headlong from the bed and lay quiet. I had hit him where I aimed.

I could not see what had happened behind the table through which I had shot at Lerod. I did not wait for him to thrust out his gun once more. I shot again—again—again—again—again—again into that table—shot until that automatic clicked on a shell-less chamber. Then I went up and pulled the table over. Lerod, riddled with lead and splinters, lay huddled, dead, behind it. Our quarrel was settled. MacFarland and Snips could sleep in peace.

Already there were shouts in the street and pounding at the front door. I glanced around and decided. I noted the position of the open window. Then, taking a step nearer the light switch, I shot at the white ivory button. I wanted to do more than merely put out the lights. I put them out definitely. Then, going to the window, I leaned over and felt. Sure enough—there was a ladder.

Down it I tumbled. Then out of the darkness a voice, seemingly from the ground:

"Everhard? Everhard?"

"Yes. What——"

"That —— nigger's bolted. I'm done for. Hearn got me. I stayed to look on. I knew I oughtn't. Everhard—you got them both?"

"Yes, but——"

"I lied all the way. I never wrote but one letter to Washington—wrote that yesterday—you'll hear from it. Lean down, Everhard, lean down, —— you! I've got to confess."

SOMEHOW it never occurred to me to be afraid of Gaboreau at that moment. Perhaps it was because I had believed what he had confessed up in that room. I couldn't see anything but most indistinctly, and there was a great clattering and shouting going on in the street. I leaned down.

"Everhard," he whispered, "I thought they'd get you! I planned for that. You believe me, don't you? I knew you'd kill them—but I thought they'd get you! Weren't they terrified, though? Listen, Everhard—I am the devil! I wanted you all in hell with me. I wrote a letter—yesterday—yesterday?—day before—some time—Everhard—yes—planned to kill you, too!"

Some way I knew the man lied. He had not planned to kill me. For one thing, Gaboreau's plans didn't go awry so easily. He knew that I did not miss when I shot and that perhaps no man could shoot so quickly.

But it was like Gaboreau to lie with his last breath. It was like Gaboreau to taunt with intentions that he never had. He was inexplicable and unanalyzable. Gaboreau "as he might have been" was the Gaboreau who had given his brains to the side of law and order—the Gaboreau who would, Samson-like, pull down the temple to crush such people as Conrad Hearn.

I stooped and lifted him.

He was weak-voiced, weak of body—as if there could be many degrees of weakness in that frail, crippled body—and he protested against me touching him. He said that he was dead; that just simply because he could talk a little made no difference. He was dead. To put him down, or his friends out of hell wouldn't know where to find his body!

Indeed, Gaboreau was a lunatic—but such lunacy, always consistent and always baffling, unexpected.

I didn't know how I was going to get away. There was no escape that I knew of from the back. But I didn't greatly care. That is, I did care, but I was too desperate to feel that I cared.

Holding Gaboreau in my arms, I boldly started around front.

"What's this?"

"Who are you?"

"Here's somebody!"

"What's happened?"

Almost a mob was there already, a mob overflowing about the house; and detectives—they had been in the neighborhood as if waiting for the tragedy.

I had to take the chance of being recognized. I was not in a mood for anything but direct action. I could never have imagined that I would feel even sympathy for Gaboreau—and I felt something infinitely stronger!

I ordered people back as if I spoke with the voice of Headquarters. They fell away until a detective rushed up, flinging suspicious questions. Another followed him.

I lied rapidly. I believe convincingly. Conrad Hearn had been murdered, I said. His secretary—whom I carried—shot, and the murderer was still in the house. I was a detective myself—I flung open my coat, where one of the police badges I had taken that night in the Klemscott reposed—and this man I carried had to be got to the hospital.

"Who did it?" they demanded.

And Hugo paid the penalty of treacherously deserting Gaboreau.

"The big negro footman," I said.

It seemed that these detectives, who had been shadowing the house for some time, had caught glimpses of Hugo. They were convinced—but there were other things to be explained. I posed as a detective. They did not know me. They said so.

"I know you don't. I was detailed secretly to guard Hearn. I bungled that; I admit it. But this secretary—his life has to be saved, or you'll never get the complete story. Get a machine, one of you, and come with me to the Emergency. There's no time to waste. The nigger's in the house—dangerous—armed. Wait for reserves before you try to break in."

Neither of those detectives knew me. Possibly they had seen me, but they did not know me. They may have been a little suspicious that all was not right, but they couldn't wholly doubt. Besides, there was no time for them to stop and talk it over between them. The crowd was around. Policemen hate the nose of a crowd. I, instead of trying to escape, had demanded that one of them go with me to the Emergency.

A machine was found—plenty were in the street. The owner was pressed into service. Gaboreau was stowed inside. He seemed unconscious, but I caught furtive eyelids peeking. He had heard all, and he played the part. The man was sheer will—sheer energy, superhuman. We started. The detective sat in the tonneau; the owner was at the wheel. The detective asked questions rapidly, nervously, eager for details. I answered, coining lies with rapidity and dovetailing precision—then we were clear of the crowd. We turned into a quiet street. The driver was taking a cut through an alley. It was the chance I could not refuse.

A gun went into the detective's face.

"By ——, I knew it!" he cried in exasperation as his hands went up.

Another one at the head of the driver brought him to a stop. I quickly searched both and stood them against the wall. They could make what commotion they pleased as soon as I started. Sixty seconds start was all I could reasonably ask for. I got more than that. I heard them yelling as they went about to search for some machine to give chase, but I was off and away, around corners and hopelessly out of sight before any one picked up the trail.

I did not know what to do or where to go. Gaboreau had no home that I knew of, except that miserable retreat from the Hole. To call any physician was to give myself over as a prisoner. To get him to my apartment was impossible without running the risk of attracting attention.

I slowed down, stopped and spoke to him. No answer. I turned the flashlight on to his face. The last flicker of life responded. His eyes twitched; his lips moved; he whispered thickly a name that I could not quite catch—or I did catch it but couldn't believe it.

"Tell —— all," came laboriously.

His eyes opened and did not close. He was dead—Gaboreau was dead.

I felt a chill colder than cold night air. It wouldn't have taken much for me to fancy the beat of broad, black wings bearing Gaboreau away.

His last words were advice to tell a certain person at Washington everything—"all." Though that did not seem so entirely unnatural in the light of the confession Gaboreau had made to Hearn, still, it was inconceivable that I should do anything of the kind. It was not beyond Gaboreau to summon out of Death's own hands strength enough to throw me into a trap with such advice. I did not believe that he would do such a thing—but one could believe anything and be sure of nothing where Gaboreau was concerned. He had, at the bottom of the ladder, denied ever having written to Washington except the day before. Who knew that he had written then? Or what? Who could tell whether he had written at all? Gaboreau's mind could see and plan extemporaneously with a rapidity that dazzled whoever came within range of him.

There was nothing more to do. I must leave him, and so I left him—alone and as mysterious in death as he had been in life. I spread a robe over him, doing it perhaps with the unconscious feeling for the chill night. I took a last look at his face. In the glare of the electric torch the features appeared sharp with the strong effect of white light and massed shadows. The hooked, beaked nose and upturned chin, the lips tightly set and inwardly curved, the broad, high forehead, the deep, deep and wide-staring eyes—all oddly blended into an expression of quiet content. Perhaps he was glad to be free of that crippled body.

I could scarcely force myself away. I felt there was a closer connection between us than either had fully appreciated. I wanted to do something—something that seemed fitting—but there was nothing I could do. I adjusted the robe closer around his throat and left.

XVII

WHEN I returned home, I found Jerry, feet on the table, shoulders almost in the bottom of a deep chair, smoking a short, noisy pipe.

"All quiet, Jerry?"

"Yes, sir!"

But his eyes were on my clothes—covered with a brown stain. He glanced anxiously into my face.

I shook my head. I was not hurt, not so much as scratched.

"Gaboreau is dead," I told him.

He was frankly skeptical.

"Again?"

"No. Definitely."

"Funny," said Jerry.

He knew how and when Gaboreau had helped me on former occasions when I had reasons to expect anything but help.

"I didn't do it."

Then I told Jerry pretty much what had happened; and he, as I, wondered what Gaboreau had actually had in mind.

"The Chink's the only one awake," he said with a head-jerk toward the bathroom. "Them Chinamen ain't human."

"There's only one way out, Jerry. You will manage to get these clothes of mine into the furnace, won't you? I'll change. We have to make some kind of a bluff. A hundred people saw me there this morning. Maybe some didn't recognize me. I don't know."

I changed my clothes and gave the others to Jerry, and he slipped out. Being trained in burglary and its stealth has advantages. Jerry, big as he was and apparently clumsy, was quiet and quick as a shadow.

I sat down to think. Heaven knows I needed at that moment to do some thinking, and my fingers played with a deck of new cards. I had but two roads to choose. I could bluff or I could run. I did not know how far I could bluff. I did not know how far I could run. I never had run away. I did not intend to begin. No.

I tried the telephone and was told that Burgess was out of the city. He had gone to Washington. I remembered that he would scarcely have had time to be back. Gaboreau's greatness had been in the fact that he did not so much create situations as that he took advantage of them. I saw a way to placate somewhat my four prisoners in the fact that, Burgess being out of the city, I could not, obviously, get in communication with him.

Like a flash I saw my way clear. It was wonderfully simple after I had perceived the way out. And, while I will lie and do it with as straight a face as a man can assume, I do not like to. A lie is always confession of weakness—it weakens something down inside of the fellow that uses it, no matter how externally triumphant it may be. And yet I could not, I did not dare for one thing, tell Burgess all the facts. There would be Vivian to explain. He had seen her at the Klemscott. There were other things that I did not care to explain. But I saw a way out.

I telephoned again and again to all numbers imaginable that possibly had any connection with Burgess and left word for him to call me up. I thought that I must be able to show that I had tried desperately hard to get in touch with him.

Jerry had returned and was, from the depths of his chair, calmly smoking the rattling pipe.

The slow, gray dawn came over the city and grew into morning. I may have been tired, but I did not feel so. I had too much to think about.

Those four prisoners worried me.

I was afraid of Burgess—not as a man, but as a police officer. I have always been suspicious of politicians. I felt that, to strengthen his reputation, he would sacrifice me as quickly as he would discard a burned match.

Then of a sudden there came a clatter at my door. Jerry opened it.

BURGESS crowded past him. Burgess—fat, puffy, excited and alone. He talked rapidly and said many things before I began to understand him.

"By ——, Everhard, you are in a tight

hole," was a sentence that he repeated frequently.

That interested me, of course—but not so much as other things he said. He wanted to know how this "nigger" came to be mixed up in it? He wanted to know just what had happened—he wanted to know lots of things, and yet he was rather incoherent, because there seemed so much that he wanted to tell me. Finally he swung into coherence:

"I'm just back from Washington. I found out things there. I found out you're not in the Federal service, but——"

Things seemed to be going from bad to worse for me—and he did not know of the prisoners in my bathroom!

"But Gaboreau was!"

I looked hard at him and shook my head. That could not be true.

"Yes; he was!"

"Impossible."

"Nothing impossible for that old—old— Well, by ——, he wasn't a devil! He was a man!"

"You must have learned something at Washington," I said.

I had to say something.

"I did. And you, Everhard, you've stirred up more hell than a Fenian riot. Looks bad for you."

"Let's have some facts."

"Facts! Say, I went down to Washington, and I met him—you know. Well, he said that confession of the Dobell woman was interesting—but read this. And he shoved a letter at me. Seems like after the affair of the German spy nest Gaboreau met some Washington people. You see, they knew what he had done, but they didn't have evidence. He told them things that started this Federalization of police—crazy legislation. Then Gaboreau vanished. Nothing more was heard from him—though there was a good deal about him. The department was constantly receiving tips that Gaboreau was the Unknown. Understand? They knew where to find him. Under the name of Ducot. May have watched his house. But they knew he wasn't doing anything. Saw nobody. Never went out. Besides, Washington was grateful—so grateful that he was consulted on this Unknown business. He suggested the plan that Gowan McFarland tried to put through. Gaboreau insisted that he didn't know any more about the Unknown than anybody else—and cared less. You know what happened with McFarland.

"Well, sir, the straw that broke the camel's back was the murder of Senator Rawlins. It seems the fellow picked out to confess to that murder used to be one of Gaboreau's gangsters. And he was scared to death. He knew what bringing the old man's name into publicity meant—a sliced throat for the snitch. But he would have had his throat cut, anyway—by this Shaylor, Dorel, Lerod—whoever he is. So what did the fellow do but tip Gaboreau off that when Rawlins was murdered Gaboreau would be accused.

"Seems like, the minute he got that warning, Gaboreau knew who was behind it. This fellow, Lerod. The minute Rawlins was murdered, Gaboreau disappeared. Not a trace could be found. Nothing was heard of him till the other day when a letter came to Washington telling the whole —— thing about Hearn, Lerod, you and all, but with not a name in it. Funny, wasn't it? No name but Gaboreau's. He signed it. He said, 'I'm going to wipe out the whole mess—then it will be your official duty to catch me, hang me, to the greater glory of peace and order.' He said lots of things. Great letter. That was the letter given me to read after I showed the Dobell confession. You'd be surprized how the two gibed. 'Don't worry about that striped bandit,' he said. 'He's taken McFarland's place—but doesn't intend to have his throat cut!'

"I'd like to know who that fellow is. But to get on. Gaboreau said, 'If I mentioned names, you'd warn this billionaire crook I'm after and probably arrest my gunman'—that was you, Everhard.

"Well, sir, Washington was skeptical till I brought my Dobell confession. Then, by ——, the chief wanted to telegraph a warning to Hearn. Everhard, I objected. I got excited as ——. I told them all the things you told me—you know—that Hearn was too —— big for us to arrest. He could smash —— out of the country's finances. I said, 'Let them fight it out!' I didn't win my point, but I delayed action—then came a message at midnight giving all the names. It said: 'Hearn and Lerod are dead. Everhard did it in self-defense. Now catch me if you can! Gaboreau.'

"We just found out that the telegraph

company had had that message for two days in a sealed envelop with instructions to open and send it at 11:35 last night! On top of that came the flash that Hearn was murdered! Then something about a big negro doing it. I caught the first train out.

"I jumped up here. I want the facts. What happened? Did you do it? By ——, it looks bad for you, Everhard."

It may seem incredible, but I wasn't thinking of Burgess or of myself. I was thinking of that poor withered, cold body —Gaboreau. He had planned and struck and died—magnificently. I had been scarcely more than a puppet; Lerod had been as putty; Hearn the most gullible of dupes. After all, Gaboreau had not expected me to be killed. He knew I would have to take chances—but my chances never worried him. He had left me in a tight hole, for none other than himself had been in a position to swear that it was self-defense. Yet he probably counted on the generosity of the police and Secret Service to believe my story, since it was supported by his messages. Perhaps he had not thought much of me at all or cared. And yet I felt that he did.

To Burgess I said:

"You know you wanted me to get tied up with Hearn. And it happened just about as Gaboreau reported."

I told him down to the last detail just what did happen and finished by throwing open the bathroom door and pointing inside.

Burgess almost fell over in his astonishment. There was a rapid clatter of questions and accusations.

I said briefly, to the point, that even Burgess' own secretary had been in Lerod's pay; that I didn't know but that these men were crooks themselves; and that as police officers they had bungled by interfering with plans Burgess and I laid together. If I had been arrested, my usefulness to Burgess would have been ended. Hearn, too, would not have thought me nearly so clever, so important to him.

"And you, Perkins," I said accusingly, "are the biggest fool of all. I saved your life by hitting you in the shoulder. I had been jumped by more than one gangster that morning, and how did I know you weren't another—wearing a police badge? Look up your police records; you'll find that Shaylor—Lerod—Dorel—and I had an old long-standing quarrel. He did hire policemen—Burgess' secretary for one. And I wasn't taking chances. After I shot, I realized—" this wasn't exactly true, but I was talking for effect—"that no gangster would have your nerve and pluck. That's why I left the money. And, of course, I didn't want to be arrested. But, if I had thought you were a detective—why—why shouldn't I have gone peaceably with you and then appealed to Burgess here? He would have vouched for me."

"You bet I would," said Burgess, and he added some things not calculated to increase the self-respect of the three policemen. To Brown of the Secret Service he said—

"You'd better get in touch with your chief."

That's about all.

The policemen, crestfallen, sore internally and externally, left. Burgess and Jerry and I remained. We were silent for a time.

And Vivian, thinking all had left and unable to restrain herself longer, burst into the apartment to weep in happiness over my being alive.

She and Burgess were face to face.

Burgess was dazed. He was sure his eyes had played him tricks.

Vivian laughed.

Burgess stuttered:

"Everhard—I don't under—what—who —do you know?" Then directly, challengingly, accusingly at me he shouted. "Who in —— are you, anyway?"

I told him. I told him everything, and his face was a study first in doubts, then in— Well, Burgess slapped a fat thigh with one hand and my shoulder with the other.

"You held up the Phoenix! —— you, Everhard—I—I—always thought you were more or less of a bluff. Had the bad rep and the quiet manner. But—say, I'm goin' to get you out of this if I have to muzzle half the police force and raid a dozen newspaper offices! By ——, you and Gaboreau were a team! The striped bandit! Everhard, if that loot is in the mails—well, I know it's there—and, if it is, you can count on me hushing this up just as far as I can go; and I can go pretty —— far—if I am fat!"

Burgess suggested, however, that I and my "family," meaning Jerry and Yang Li as well as Vivian, should go on a long journey.

"Hearn's dead now—we can show up his character. It won't be hard!" said Burgess.

I felt that I owed him a deep apology. I had never thought he would be anything like a friend—and I had always thought I was a good judge of character!

* * *

JUST one thing more. My part in the affair never came to light. Gaboreau got all the credit and the blame. And, as a distant relative by marriage, I and Vivian took charge of the funeral services. It was a fitting funeral—Vivian went deep into her purse.

It seemed as if all the world tried to attend. All that was known and reported of him flared for days in the news columns. The whole story of Hearn's diabolical plan was unfolded—and of Gaboreau's fight against him. Oddly enough, Hugo got the credit for being the instrument Gaboreau had used. The negro was never found. No doubt he, being familiar with the plans for escape and hiding Gaboreau had made, traitorously took advantage of them. Among those who attended, perhaps more out of curiosity than to do Gaboreau honor, were certain men from Washington, Burgess and many from the police department. They stood by his grave—and no doubt, if the spirit of Gaboreau looked on, it cackled cynically.

But that spirit was at rest at last—particularly if the news of this world is known in the other.

Gaboreau had received the wound that left him crippled, helpless, in the Franco-Prussian War in the fighting around Sedan.

And on the day that withered, wasted, worn shell of flesh of his was put away, Germany surrendered—unconditionally.

THE END

THE PREACHER WOULDN'T EXCHANGE

BY E. A. BRININSTOOL

WHEN Captain Jack, chief of the Modoc Indians, was hanged at Fort Klamath, Oregon, on October 3, 1873, with three of his tribesmen, for the murder of Gen. E. R. S. Canby and the Rev. E. Thomas while acting as members of the peace commission under a flag of truce in the Lava Beds on the California-Oregon border in April, 1873, a white preacher comforted him on the scaffold.

Captain Jack was told that he must die bravely; that he was going to a beautiful country where he never would want for anything—the white man's God would see that he was bountifully supplied. The chief listened to the words of the "black robe" in silence for a moment; then he said—

"It is a nice place I am going to, is it?"

"A most beautiful country, Jack," answered the preacher.

"And I will never want for anything in that wonderful place?"

"Not a thing. You will never have to worry about anything at all."

Again Jack pondered thoughtfully. Then he remarked with a half-smile:

"Preacher, I have a proposition to make to you. This country right here is plenty good enough for me. You say that other country is a fine place, and so I suppose you want to go there. Now, if you will trade places with me right now, I will give you twenty-five of my best ponies. What do you say?"

The preacher did not effect the change.

THE CAMP-FIRE
A Free-to-All Meeting-Place For Readers Writers and Adventurers

A GOOD many of us already know David A. Curtis through his excellent poker stories—of *Old Man Greenlaw* and other interesting characters of Mississippi River life in past days. But on the occasion of his first story in our magazine he follows the Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself:

Somewhere in New York.

If I have a weakness, and I suspect I have more than one, it is a craving for companionship of good fellows.

You ask me to introduce myself by sending a "fairly full autobiography," but to be fairly full it would be too long to hold the interest of anybody but myself. There are, however, a few things I would like to have everybody know—especially my comrades of *Adventure's* Camp-Fire.

I AM a pronounced pacifist, detesting all wars and all fighting that is not absolutely necessary in defense of oneself or of others who suffer wanton injury. Holding this view, I hopelessly regret two things. One is that I was just a little too young to fight in the Civil War. The other is that I could not get into this one. They looked at my white hair and turned me down. I hate "Who's Who," because long ago I told them when I was born and they printed the damning fact.

Adventure? Well, I've had some. I've been married twice. Generally I have played the part of the innocent bystander. A man could not be a newspaper reporter and correspondent for twenty-five years in the olden days when we had newspapers, without seeing a lot of exciting incidents and sometimes getting mixed up in them.

I remember being run out of town by the Molly Maguires on one occasion and stumbling along for some two miles, over dead bodies and wrecked cars in a coal mine after an explosion on another day, but both times I was with Julian Ralph, and he wrote both stories, so it's hardly worth while to retell them.

I'M OFTEN asked how it comes that I know the Mississippi River and the people of the Mississippi Valley so well. If you will notice, you will find that I never write about them as they are to-day, but long ago I spent some years out there, living on the boats a good part of the time, so I really have some first-hand knowledge.

"Tall aches from little toe corns grow." If any one had told me, when I sat in at the poker game in Old Man Greenlaw's saloon in Arkansas City, that I was getting the material and laying the foundation of a dozen years of work, it would have sounded foolish to me, but I made a pretty good living for at least that long out of that poker game. Incidentally a good many thousands of readers have made the acquaintance of the old man and his gang. The game itself was not specially memorable. My losses were not heavy. I had a run in with Joe Barrett, though, that—but that story has been told, too. I don't want to get garrulous.

MOST of my personal adventures don't make stories. I think I have been fired out of more newspaper offices than any other man living, since I went on the *Sun* staff in '73. Some editors have fired me three or four times. And I've made business ventures—been burned out, frozen out, robbed and financially ruined more times than I have toes. Also I've wrestled with Azrael eleven times on the operating table. It was touch and go each time, but I've had perfect health now for some seven years.

Moreover, I've drawn two capital prizes in the lottery of matrimony, and I've held a jack-high straight-flush twice inside of an hour.

Aside from all this, my life has been calm and uneventful, but I like to read about other people's adventures, and I enjoy writing about what I've seen and heard.

I strongly suspect that the most of your writers are imposing on you when they sell you their "stuff" as fiction. It is too improbable. For one, I find it hard to write fiction so preposterously incredible as the actual facts I've witnessed.—DAVID A. CURTIS.

AS A result of an inquiry at Camp-Fire by one of you as to the whereabouts of Clifford W. Sands, several have sent in a clipping from the Seattle *Post-Intelligence* of Jan. 5, 1919, which says that he has been given the Distinguished Service Cross for saving the lives of three of his men during heavy fighting in the Argonne forest, Sept. 29, 1918. His rank is given as captain, attached to the 2nd Cavalry. Congratulations to an old Camp-Fire comrade.

AT OUR Mid-February Camp-Fire I gave a list of former members of our magazine's staff who had been serving with the colors. I gave also a longer list of comrades with the colors, but did not mean to imply, as I seemed to do, that these also had been members of our staff. Only the first five came under that classification. I didn't see the chance for misunderstanding until a soldier comrade in Canada wrote asking when his soldier brother serving in Belgium had been connected with our staff. Sometimes I wish we had as large a staff as that longer list would imply.

AS SOME of you already know, we have had to discontinue our "Letter Friends" service, so far as our own soldiers and sailors are concerned, because of a ruling of the War Department against encouraging general correspondence with our men.

AT OUR First-May Camp-Fire I said that, as your interest seemed to warrant it, I'd go ahead and order some Camp-Fire buttons that could be worn by those of you who like the idea of something that will distinguish Camp-Fire members without hanging an advertising sign on them or making them conspicuous in any way, so that when they chance to meet they can recognize each other as having at least one common interest and get acquainted or not as they see fit. Well, I've done so. That is, I've talked to the manufacturer and am now waiting to see the final working design.

The button will be enamel in gold-washed edging, small and neat—only about ⅜ of an inch in diameter, screw-back. It will have nothing whatever on it except the number 71 which, as you will remember, is the number obtained by numbering the letters of the alphabet and adding those of the letters spelling "Camp-Fire." The buttons will be divided into three plain fields, the middle one carrying the "71" and the fields being blue, brown and green, representing sky, earth and sea respectively.

THIS is being written February twenty-first and it may be that the buttons will be delivered to us by the time you see this in print, but I refuse even to predict until the buttons are actually in hand. After they do arrive it will be some two months before I can notify you in print.

As to price. The estimated cost of manufacture is about 20 cents in thousand lots. Some kind of carrier will probably be needed, adding slightly to the cost. Add postage to this. There is also the cost of office handling, but this will be added or not added according to how it figures in an effort to put the selling-price at a figure convenient for mailing. Probably a button will cost an even quarter with or without stamps included for postage. By the time of our next Camp-Fire I hope to have definite data.

NOW that we've actually "gone and done it," I like the idea more and more. It will be a button of the best quality, neat and small, such as no one need hesitate to wear. It carries only the number 71, which is sufficient for those who understand its meaning, tells nothing to those who do not and is free from the charge of advertising that would justly be raised if the word "Camp-Fire" or "Adventure" appeared anywhere on the button. And it ought to do a whole lot toward getting us better acquainted among ourselves, with especial usefulness for those who wander into the far places.

OUR old friends, members in highest standing of our Camp-Fire, the citizens of Piperock, Paradise and Curlew, have joined with the Cross-J outfit in sending a photograph to all the rest of us. Since it is difficult for all the rest of us to gather in one place to pass resolutions, I'm venturing to act as our spokesman and to state that every last one of us is now fully convinced that these esteemed friends are really on the map; and further to elucidate that if Fortune ever guides our footsteps near Yaller Rock County we'll sure take a chance and drop in on their hospitality and other things in the hope of getting still better acquainted.

To all ye readers of *Adventure* who have laughed with us or at us, we send a greeting from Yaller Rock County. Some skeptical hombre said: "There ain't no such animal," and for his benefit, or for the benefit of any who might feel skeptical in the future, we send this photograph.

Piperock, Paradise, Curlew and the Cross-J outfit held a meeting to devise ways and means of sending you a greeting. Magpie Simpkins suggested sending a picture to prove to you that we are honest-to-gosh folks. "Hassayampa" Harris suggested that we elect four delegates to be photographed.

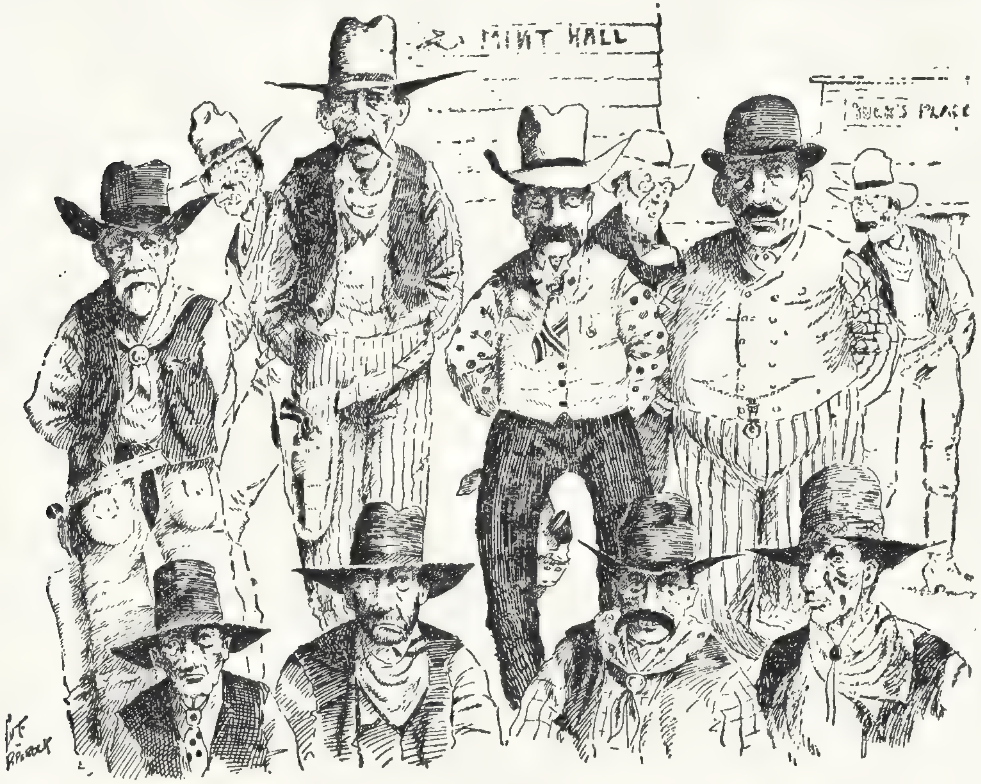
"Sad" Samuels moved and seconded a motion that we elect four alternates, to be used in case there was any casualties among the delegates. Every suggestion was passed. Then "Scenery" Sims opined that the four alternates might as well get into the picture, which was passed by the four alternates. The delegates agreed to this, providing that we set down on the ground in front and remain passive.

Hassayampa didn't want to appear belligerent, so he took off his gun and belt and held it out of sight. Just about the time that the photographer got ready to show us the birdie, "Telescope" Tolliver, "Old Testament" Tilton and "Doughgod" Smith has to horn into the picture. There would have been a killing if we'd 'a' knowed it. Reading from left to right, back row—not taking notice of them three aforementioned snake-hunters:

"Jay Bird" Whittaker, Cross-J; Magpie Simpkins, sheriff, Piperock; "Hassayampa" Harris, Curlew; Mike Pelly, Paradise. Front Row: "Scenery" Sims, Paradise; "Sad" Samuels, Curlew; Ike Harper, Piperock; "Chuck" Warner, Cross-J.

Folks may get the idea that we're a hardened lot of hombres, but we can point with pride to the fact that there ain't been a violent death in the county since Sitting Bull got up and walked away. Maybe at times we skate close to the cemetery; maybe we show absolute ignorance at times, but there ain't a community on earth that gets more fun out of life than we do, and if we can make you folks laugh once in a while—hurrah for our side.

Yours with the peace-sign,
YALLER ROCK COUNTY.



THE lost cities of the Incas. Here is an extremely interesting letter from a comrade living in Lorain, Ohio, at the time of writing.

S. S. *Thomas F. Cole,*
St. Mary's River.

Dear Congenial Spirits of the Camp-Fire: I noticed with interest the exchange of letters between Mr. Johnson and Mr. Young. I'm deciding to bring my Log and my yarn to sit in. Leaving Mollendo in Peru during the Spring of 1906, I traveled by way of Titicaca and Cuzco over a pass in the Cordilleras into the upper Amazon country. I stayed there two years, traveling by compass and the correct judgment of distance of land-marks in a wide half-circle to the land east, then back south until I reached the main Amazon some 500 miles down-stream.

I WAS lately under the impression that railroads were being built through there, but I see from Mr. Johnson's letter that this is not so. There are two large towns inhabited by the genuine Inca tribe and ruled by a daughter of the sun in the fastnesses of the Futahy hill region. The houses are built from square hewn rock with grass or bark roofs. Their temples are hewn into the rocks, each subterranean hall decorated with symbols of the sun and a curious kind of picture-writing. All their burros and guanacos live in one large community corral.

THE people claimed to have come from the coast where they were driven out by white men dressed in white metal. The name of the one town is Itzuatl; the other name I have forgotten, also the name of the reigning chieftainess. The people are friendly and good natured upon closer acquaintance. I had no trouble with them. Their weapons are blowpipes and feathered darts and short lances with bronze heads, also bronze daggers, used to rip up. Sorry I haven't my old Log at hand or I would give you the approximate longitude and latitude of these cities.

You might tell Mr. Johnson that if he finds these places he'll find an old Irishman there, very much married and very happy to see a white man. Possibly I'll beat Mr. Johnson down there; it's too noisy around here by day and too quiet by night.—George W. Brunke.

P. S—Looking through my Log-book I find that the name of the Aztec prince who engineered the exodus of the Inca tribe over the Andes is Cuscama. Also I might mention that Itzuatl is situated on the banks of a lake, shallow but very clear water, the circumference being about 21 miles.—G. W. B.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue, a word from Hugh S. Fullerton on steamship navigation on the Great Lakes:

Navigating steamships on the Great Lakes differs from salt water navigation. The cities and towns are not builded on the shores, in most cases, but are situated a short distance inland on smaller lakes separated from the big lakes by sand dunes and connected with them by narrow channels. The small lakes themselves are usually the distended mouths of rivers, held back by the sand dunes, and in almost every case the mouths of these rivers are guarded by shifting bars of sand.

PASSENGER boats plying the inland seas are operated by minutes and seconds. A vessel, clearing Chicago at 6 P.M. lays a course "one point off" for Ludington, the first stop on the Michigan coast. The captain orders the chief engineer to "turn 103," having figured that, with the existing wind and sea conditions, 103 revolutions of the screw per minute will bring the vessel to the entrance to Ludington harbor at 6 A.M. Leaving Manistee, for instance, a vessel, stroked at 97 revolutions, will hold one course for four minutes, another for forty seconds, due north for thirty-two minutes and, in densest fog, will turn and enter the narrow dredged channel leading to Portage Lake.

Going through Georgian Bay the plot of a vessel's course resembles the lines of an eccentric corkscrew. Twisting in and out among the ten thousand islands of the bay, a vessel runs by the watch, the time chart reading: twenty-seven seconds, one minute forty-three seconds, fourteen seconds, three minutes nine seconds, eleven minutes, one minute ten seconds and so on.

Even in dense fog or on the darkest nights scarcely slacking speed, the helmsman steers by chart and watch, depending upon the engineer to maintain a regular speed.

THE vessels are not light draught (nearly fifty per cent. of them were taken to the Atlantic for war work), nor have they the weight of ocean vessels. It is the marvelous skill of masters in handling the vessels that is astonishing. As Johnny Mack, the steward, remarked as we watched Captain Stufflebeam make a particularly delicate landing:

"On a heavy dew the old man could make a landing at the post-office and get his mail."—Hugh S. Fullerton.

WHO was T. Hutter, U. S. Scout No. 7, 1832, Fort Wa.? And I wish we knew the history of those thirty-two notches on his rifle-stock.

Richmond Hill, N. Y.

While wandering through Flushing, L. I., I found an old muzzle-loading rifle, the stock of which bore the following inscription:

"T. Hutter—U. S. Scout—No. 7—August 27, 1832—Fort Wa." The name on the barrel would indicate H. Gibbs of Lancaster, Pa., as the maker. Any information concerning this scout and his activities will be greatly appreciated. There were thirty-two notches in the stock of this rifle.—Anthony M. Voelker.

HERE'S another old friend of ours, the Gila monster. Unfortunately I don't know just which of several Camp-Fire letters the writer of the following is answering. As is our custom in these discussions we hear all sides of a case, so far as we can get them, and then every fellow forms his own opinion. It doesn't matter which letter it was; this one can stand on its own feet. But, comrade Williams, don't hold me personally responsible for all the opinions you hear at Camp-Fire.

I never said they smell bad, or sweet either, for that matter. In fact, I never said *anything* about them at Camp-Fire, either for or against. I've just sat back and listened like the rest. I never wronged a Gila monster in my life. But if some one else wants to wrong one at Camp-Fire, he has a right to.

Newark, N. J.

Having read the description of the Gila monster in the Camp-Fire, I wish to ask this gentleman personally just how many Gila monsters he has ever seen, and also if the one that has a liking for hands is the one on a slab in a drug store on Congress Street. I also suggest that the War College experiment on them in place of poison gas. Now for your information: my handle is W. P. Williams. I have prospected, punched cattle and hunted in the country where this pest lives, not on the streets of Tucson, Arizona, or in the lobby of the Santa Rita, only for the general "misinformation of tenderfeet."

His color, like any other creature, depends on his geographical location, and I have seen them almost yellow, and then again, in a hilly, wooded country, almost black.

NOW for my criticism. Rattlesnakes or Gila monsters never attack man or anything only their natural food. Reptiles shed their skin in the early Fall and at this time are almost blind and will strike at the least sound. This story of a man playing with one sounds to me like a fish, and as for the idea of one poisoning a man with its breath in the open that reminds me of the story of the bottomless lake (there is one in every State), or the hoop-and-joint snake that grabs its tail and rolls down hill and flies to pieces when it hits a tree, later to wiggle together again.

The writer wishes to call your attention to the Museum of Natural History in New York where you can obtain more real information in a minute than native sons of any place can give you in a year.

I wish to tell the editor that personally I am as well acquainted with the reptiles referred to as he is with dogs and cats, that a Gila monster doesn't smell any worse than a copperhead, and it very, very rarely bites, that when it does bite, the gentleman from Tucson has the right dope, it bites to die.

AS FOR spelling, I am a poor one but most Navajos speak Spanish and you can't spell it any other way in that language. I personally am not acquainted with Rodney but I am for him strong and wish to ask the major if the word Gila was ever spelled Gilla? In connection with a town, river or a monster? The word is always pronounced "hele" by natives. There is an "l" and "ll" in the Spanish. I don't know what I am talking about now—'tis information I want. I have seen the word printed Gilla. For the major's information I will say I speak, besides United States, three Indian lingoes and Spanish.

We are strong for the Camp-Fire but Mr. Editor give it to us easy.—W. P. Williams.

Who will give comrade Williams the information he asks for? Major Rodney is now Colonel Rodney—he was a captain when we first knew him—and a very busy colonel at that, so some other comrade may have to be called on.

BUT how about the statement that a musuem can give more information in a minute than native sons can give in a year? Personally, I think they can and, then again, they can't. I'm all for scientific knowledge. Encyclopedias are fine, scientific experts invaluable. But on a small scale I've been trying to learn some practical farming lately. The experiment stations and the books by scientific experts help me a lot, but somehow I keep finding all the time that if some of the neighboring "native sons" didn't give me the benefit of their "ignorance" I'd be in a mess most of the time instead of only part of the time.

But it happens, too, that we'll soon be having some reliable, scientific "museum" information on treating snake-bites and that just the other day I wrote for the scientific facts on the Gila monster.

WE'VE had a lot of authoritative dope on fire-arms. Here comes some on cowboy equipment, which should be of particular value to writers of Western stories. Mr. MacManus, in his just complaint about authors, is not aiming at our writer's brigade but at all magazines and movies in general. Our people make mistakes, too, of course, but in most cases those of you who know the West give them a comparatively high grade, often even praising them in this respect. Most of our people write from various degrees of first-hand experience.

I know the following will be of interest to many of you. And very likely it will call forth discussion on various points. Our thanks to comrade MacManus.

Michigan.

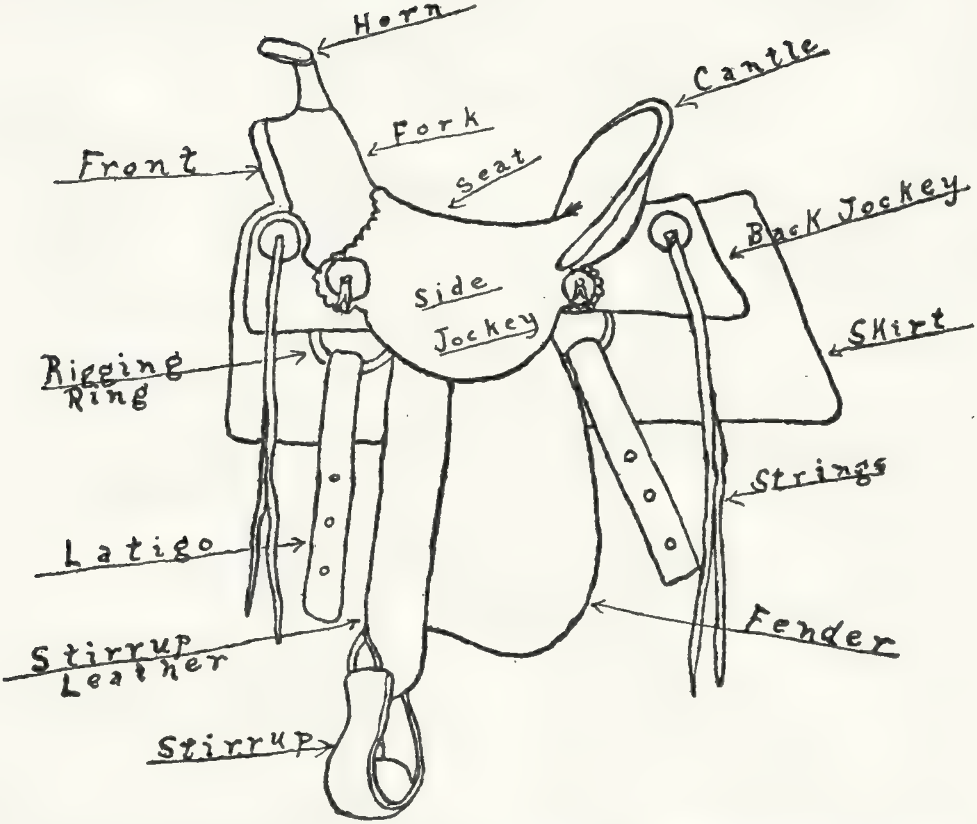
When Messrs. Brown and Wiggins wrote concerning firearms they certainly pulled the trigger and let fly a hammer that had been held in leash entirely too long. If writers would carefully observe the dates they give, also calibers and models, there would be fewer fiction heroes of the 60's armed with .38 automatics and other impossible things.

I THINK that criticism surely tends to improve the work of story writers and, following this thought, I wish to say a few words concerning the wild and woolly Western stories which seem to be very popular. I am sorry to say that a great share of these stories are too impossible and in small details give readers a very poor impression of our West and life there. Some few writers know the West and its people, but far more of them guess at things, and their stories, to people who know, are, to say the least, obnoxious.

Beginning with horses: There never was such an animal as a trained bucking-horse. Some may argue this point, but in the end we will all shake and agree that this is true. A horse may have been spoiled in the breaking or otherwise turned outlaw, but trained bucking-horses are unknown. By bucking-horse I mean a real "wampus-cat." Outlaw horses have various methods of making a rider "reach for the horn and get a handful of grass." They "sun-fish," "spin," "crow-hop," "fence-row," "side-wind," and other things not classified. Many "twisters" discover new antics very often and sometimes to their sorrow.

ANOTHER terrible blunder is made by referring to the manner in which the rider controlled the actions of his favorite mount by the pressure of his knees. In a heavy stock saddle the average man can not exert enough pressure in this way to make a horse pay any heed. However, many horses "mind the spurs," so to speak.

All well-trained Western saddle horses are "neck-reiners" and a rider does not jerk the right or left rein sharply as is so often told. The reins are grasped and held at even lengths and if the rider desires to turn to the right, he swings his hand to the right which draws the left rein taut along the left side of the horse's neck, and you might say "pulls" him in that direction. When turning to the left the above is reversed. Owing to the fact that good horsemen unconsciously lean in the direction they are turning, most old saddle horses can be turned by leaning in the saddle.



OTHER heroes of Western fiction have ridden pet mares. Please give them horses and let the mares run to rais' em horses. The reasons for cow-men invariably riding horses are too many to enumerate. The best way to learn them all in a bunch is to ride a mare with any old outfit. Not even Billions Shart rides a mare in his most chivalrous productions.

THE Western stock saddle also receives much abuse when certain writers refer to its different parts. The part most frequently mis-named is the "horn." They persistently call it "pommel," but in the West it always has been and is now called the "horn." There is no such thing as a saddle "flap," but a saddle pocket may have a flap.

Stock saddles are "double-rigged" (two inches), "three-quarter" (single or double); "three-quarter single," "center-fire," "five-eighths" and "Spanish." The article called a "girth" in the East is invariably called a "cinch" (from Spanish *cincha*) in the West. A saddle is often called "kak" or "hull."

THE words "lasso" and "lassoed" often appear in stories, but the punchers say "rope" and "roped." Ropes are of several kinds: rawhide, *maquey* fiber (Mexican), manila, sisal, cotton and linen. In the Southwest fiber ropes are often called "grass-ropes." This term originated when fiber ropes first broke the long reign of rawhide ropes. The small loop or eye through which one end of the rope passes to form the large loop is called a "*hondo*" (Spanish). They are made of brass, zinc or rawhide, but in late years the favorite hondo is made by tying or splicing a loop, so forming a tight hondo. Professional ropers make use of such terms as "heeling," "spreading a loop," "tying on to 'im," "heaving the hemp."

WHEN a roper makes his "catch," he holds by dropping a loop or double-bowline knot in the back end of rope over the saddle-horn, or by taking "dallys" (turns) on the horn. I have heard the former called "hard-hold" ropers. Trick and fancy roping is probably the most artistic work done by cowboys. A description of it would fill a good-sized volume, so shall have to pass it by.

A standard throw-rope is about thirty-five feet in length. "Slim," the hero of a well-known book, threw one hundred and fifty feet, but that was on paper. It can't be done. I know a man on the Pine Ridge Reservation who can make wonderful catches with sixty feet, but such men are scarce, tall, and long armed. When a man can "pick 'em up all around him" with thirty-five feet he is a roper, and some of the best ropers I know use thirty to thirty-three feet.

WRITERS often refer to the cow-man's side-arm as a "revolver," but on the range it is a "gun" or a "six." As stated by Brown and Wiggins, much impossible gun-play is described in fiction. In the movies, too, a gun-man is often shown with the drop on twenty or thirty men, but he can thank his lucky stars that it isn't the real thing. We read now and then that the hero "returned his gun to its 'scabbard.'" The contrivance in which they pack guns in the West is called a "holster." A rifle or carbine is carried in scabbard slung from the saddle.

The "leggings" worn by Western horsemen are called "chaps" (soft *ch*, from Spanish *chaparejos*).

WHAT I had intended to be a short letter has grown long and no doubt will weary some readers. It is without intent to injure the feelings of any writer that I have written the foregoing and I sincerely hope that it may serve somebody in need of such information. The use of accurate expressions in any story surely makes it a joy to the reader who happens to know the people and country which it concerns, and certainly can not injure its import to the uninitiated.

Caroline Lockhart in her famous Western story "Me—Smith" proved her thorough knowledge of range life in one short sentence: Smith, originally from Texas, after holding up the Englishman (in Wyoming) left him with the remark: "Just the same, I admires your nerve—ridin' a double-rig in a single-rig country." Enough to make any ex-rider forget to braid a cigarette and read on.—ANGUS MAC MANUS.

Michigan.

Received your letter acknowledging receipt of my information concerning horses and cowboy life.

I am writing this short note to say that the drawing of a saddle I enclosed was made hurriedly and I remember one part which is not shown as I had intended:

THE two straps marked "latigoes" hanging from riggings rings appear in drawing to be short billits. I intended to show these straps hanging in rolls, for latigoes are generally five to six feet in length and in "circling" are passed from rigging-ring through cinch-ring up through rigging-ring, then down on inside and again through cinch ring, receiving cinch ring tongue when drawn tight. This operation forms a block and tackle action which makes it possible to cinch even too tightly.

The above are used on the "near" side. Those "off" side are looped through rigging-ring and reach double through cinch ring and tongue passes through both thicknesses. These short latigoes are changed in adjustment only when necessary, as happens when using horses of various girths.

In some sections softer latigoes are used and are tied in hitches on rigging-rings, but their use is surely falling away in favor of the much quicker buckle-tongue latigo.

As it was my wish to make the information in this article absolutely reliable and as easily understood as possible, I hope this letter reaches you in time to publish with it.—ANGUS MACMANUS.

ONE of the most valued things in my life is the acquaintanceships and friendships that have grown up during the more than eight years of our magazine's life. I won't slop over about it, but I mean very fully what I say. It would take quite a little while for me even to list them over in my mind. I don't want to lose any of them.

It has always been a regret that in writing to the many of you who write to me I often could not write so fully as I felt like doing. But I've done the best I could. I don't believe any of you has ever written to me or to the magazine without getting an answer, and generally a personal answer, if his letter even faintly called for a personal reply. If he has, there has been an accident.

IT TAKES time. Often a short little letter with a seemingly simple request and getting a brief answer takes an amazing amount of time. It isn't just the strictly business letters that kill the hours. They are generally the easy ones. The other kind? I couldn't tell you about them if I tried, and I haven't the right to try. For they pretty well run the gamut of human affairs in one way or another. A good many of you may remember some little thing or other, not magazine business, that we've talked about by letter. Well, multiply your own case by I don't know how many hundreds or thousands and then figure that while some of the others may be cases similar to your own most of them deal with all kinds of other matters. Oh yes, it eats up a lot of my time. But I'd hate to have it stopped.

The trouble is that there are only twenty-four hours in a day and a fellow has to use part of them for sleep and food and getting from place to place. Most of the remainder of the time goes to my regular job, the necessary work on our magazine, which is very, very far from being confined to office hours only. Then there's my family. And me myself, but by the time it gets to me there's just about no time left at all. Well, no use going further into detail.

THE point is that as the magazine grows the work increases steadily in volume. We estimate our incoming first-class mail of all kinds, including manuscripts, at about 10,000 a year. And I'm likely to have the added job of another magazine besides ours. It's begun taking my time already and there's even a chance that it might be publicly announced by the time these words reach print. I'm hoping to meet a good many of you through that magazine too, though there will be no "Camp-Fire" in it. But it's going to mean lots more work for me. (What will it be like? Well, it won't be fluffy or unclean and it will try to give its readers a good time. It will have one kind of story that some of you won't like. Others will like that kind. I think most of you will like most or all of it, but don't take my word for that. Try for yourself.)

Of course there'll be plenty of others with me on the two jobs, but just the same I've had to give myself a severe efficiency once-over and plan out every minute of my time pretty carefully. I can see very plainly that I'll have to hold my letters down to brass tacks far more than ever before.

I don't want to. I like to be friends with people and to talk with them in friendly manner—not just snap a few words at them and run away. But—there are only twenty-four hours in a day.

I want you to remember how I feel about it. If my letters sometimes seem short and impersonal, I want you to remember that the spirit of them isn't impersonal—that I'm merely doing the best I can to make my time reach as far as it can in *all* the many cases.

There's one good thing. Harry Wade is back with us after his Army service. If I've been with our magazine over eight years, Wade has been with it five years. He's about as much a part of it as I am, and many of you are already in personal touch with him, not only because he's in charge of "Ask Adventure" but through his general identification with the magazine's affairs. Those of you who know him know he has no more use for conventional, formal relations with you than I have. And between us we'll do our darndest to see to it that no such formal relations creep in between our magazine's headquarters and its readers.

Well, that's all. I just wanted you to understand. I'm going to like the new magazine, but I served on five other magazines before I came to *Adventure*, and *Adventure* has always been first with me and always will be. As a magazine the new one will be fully as good as *Adventure*, and I know it will make real friends as it goes along. But it won't begin with eight years of friendships behind it.

THE following came from a hospital in Spokane. Probably he could write a better hand than I (which isn't saying much), but a man of seventy-seven in hospital isn't expected to do any copper-plate work with a pen. Anyhow there was much of his letter we couldn't make out, so had it typewritten and sent it to him, asking him to correct our mistakes. Our letter came back marked "Party no longer there."

So I'm giving you our haggled version anyway. The blanks indicate words we could not make out. Blame us, not Colonel Gardner, for mistakes. I hope this will reach his eye and that he'll tell us more about the old days on the Plains.

Spokane, Wash.

I read with much regret of loss of a — friend, Scout Jim Hanahan. Dated Blackfoot, Id., Dec. 20, 1918. Knew Jim in person from service with our Regiment, Custer's 7th U. S. Cavalry, which I was with as packer and scout, and I am the oldest living scout to-day — 77 years old. My name has not been in the lime-light like my brother scouts, but the record of myself stands the acid test. I am sick here and don't know when I will be able to get out till Spring again, so a letter will get me here.

You tell W. C. Tuttle that I hope to have the Citizens of Paradise and Pipe Rock, Montana, with myself and—train next Summer. Also will —— — — — written by me, how Arizona Bill saved Custer's rear-guard on that terrible day, June 22-24, 1876, the day of the historic fight, the Little Big Horn battle, and how many and many a time I have heard the famous 7th Cavalry band play "Garry Owen" and march to it —. It only seems like a few days ago. Yet there's no more — and —— a gas-wagon (as we say Devil-wagons), well, that's the way of the — —. Also I knew Captain Bull Dannon (?) and Uncle Kit Carson was one good (Arizona) friend. It all seems like a dream to me. I guess the bum hand write for an old timer, so I will quit. Happy to hear from you soon. Right; you may use this in Camp-Fire if you will.—Col. Raymond E. Gardner.

THE other day our comrade M. Logee, from whom we've had so many interesting letters, dropped in at the office and we got acquainted at first hand. A big, strapping man, looking none the worse for wear during nearly the whole war, on the Saloniki and French fronts, with the English and then with our own Army. Among other things, he won his commission.

ALL letters conerning fire-arms should now be sent, not to the magazine, but to J. B. Thompson or D. Wiggins, editors of our new department, "Firearms, Past and Present," under "Ask Adventure."

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

THIS country can not escape the tremendous social upheaval started by the war. The cause of the upheaval is mankind's sudden realization that it has never had real democracy. For there is no real democracy when *any* minority rules a people, whether the minority be a king or a demagog, Capital or Labor, a military clique or politicians. Democracy means the rule of the majority, for the greatest good of the greatest number. Anything else is autocracy. Our own country does not have real democracy. It is ruled by politicians and Capital, with Labor getting ready to take Capital's place in this autocracy.

Real democracy is coming. In our country as well as many others. The war has started an avalanche that is only half-way down the hill. It must take one of two paths—force or lawful democratic method.

Force is autocratic. It imposes the will of some upon others in entire violation of the democratic rights of these others. And the rule of force inevitably brings real control into the hands of fewer and fewer people. Force and democracy can not exist together.

Force violates democracy. We can not best advance democracy by violating it.

BUT if the avalanche is to follow the other path, then we must clear that path. It is not clear now.

This country is not Russia. We can, by lawful democratic methods, change our laws and government in any way we please. But we can not make the change soon enough to suit the avalanche, for the avalanche, though aiming for the right goal, is half blind and half drunk. We, the people, have the machinery, but, in the crisis, we find that it is not so good as we thought and that we have let the control of it slip from our hands into those of a minority—classes and parties.

Yet we must clear this lawful path, or the avalanche will plunge down the path of brute force, bringing chaos to the world.

How can we clear the path quickly? How gain real democracy by democratic methods instead of by force, by evolution instead of revolution, by construction instead of destruction?

First, by taking control of the machinery into the hands of the majority, of the people *as a whole.* Second, by making the machinery better.

It can be done, and quickly. In a country that has the forms of a democracy the people can always take control, when they will and *if* they will. In this crisis we *must* do it.

But when we have got control, what shall we *do?* That is the real obstruction in the path. For we do not know. Most of us, unless we still vainly dream that we have it, want real democracy and are as much a part of the avalanche as is any one else. But we don't know how to get it. It took one hundred and forty-two years, a world-war and a world-avalanche to make us even realize that this country has never had real democracy.

And we don't know how to get it because *we don't know what democracy is.* We thought we did, and drifted placidly and stupidly into the control of a minority—of an autocracy operating through the forms of a democracy. We had thought democracy was merely the privilege of doing as we pleased. We have a general idea, usually couched in very pretty phrases, of what democracy is, *but we have no definite, practical, fundamental standard of democracy to apply as test and measure of every concrete issue, great or small.* Until we do formulate that standard and apply it daily, individually, persistently, honestly and understandingly, there is no hope. For we are now trying to reach a goal without clearly knowing what the goal is.

AND the beginnings of our ignorance lie in this: We think democracy is a form of government. It is not. That is only the tool, the expression. *Democracy is a state of mind, an attitude and practise of a people, principles and the daily application of those principles.* The form of government is necessary, but it is only the machinery for expressing the attitude of mind. The fools that think democracy can suddenly be created by force are no greater fools than those who think it can be created by passing and enforcing laws.

It is on this point that our entire political education and practise has wrecked itself. All our attention has been turned upon the forms, the machinery, not upon democracy itself. Upon the means of expression, not upon the thing to be expressed. *Democracy is in the minds of the people.* If it is there, it can be trusted to find its machinery of expression; if it is not there, all the machinery in the world does not establish it. Yet we have done nothing to put it there, to keep, develop and strengthen it. Instead, we have stupidly considered it something planted by our forefathers that, unlike any other crop, required no attention, cultivation or feeding. And now, after a century and a half, we are reaping the same kind of crop that an uncared for field of corn would produce at the end of a century and a half.

No, our country fosters schools, churches, workshops, laboratories and all kinds of institutions for teaching us all kinds of things in all kinds of ways, but there is no provision for teaching us democracy. Our schools teach our children endless things, even about the machinery of government, but they do *not* teach a child how *he* can be a good citizen. They teach him to salute the flag, but give him no sound reason for doing so; teach him patriotic songs, but give him no practical understanding of his real duties to the people. *The first thing a democracy should teach is democracy.* Not formal civics or distorted, formal history, but practical, personally applied citizenship.

For the stupidity of our general training in politics and democracy the specialists are to blame—college professors, "statesmen," writers, captains of industry, labor leaders, demagogs and scholars of all kinds. A specialist in any line, being a specialist, has generally lost his perspective, his sense of proportion. He can see the fly on the barn-door, but not the barn door. They have given their attention to the *machinery* of economics and politics, with no thought at all for what builds that machinery and keeps it moving, creates it, changes it or destroys it. They are not intelligent enough to see that no form of government or economic system—democracy, monarchy, socialism, Bolshevism or any other—can flourish or endure unless there is in the minds of the people themselves the attitude and understanding to support it and give it life. They wrangle learnedly over the style of architecture for our national house, and no one of them has sufficient sense to give attention to the quality of the bricks out of which any national house must be built. *The greatest architect in the world can not build a sound house out of rotten bricks. The most learned economist can not build a sound government out of bad citizens.*

And for generations we have let the specialists do most of our thinking for us. What little thinking we have done has been on the specialized points their distorted vision has raised, on the forms of democracy, not on democracy itself.

Now we are paying the bill.

WE MUST clear the lawful, democratic path if the avalanche is not to take the lawless, undemocratic path of force. To do this we must do three things:

(1) Put real control of our governing machinery into the hands of the people themselves; the majority, not *any* minority.

(2) Make the machinery better, more democratic.

(3) Make ourselves better, learn the real meaning and practise of democracy.

Leaving No. 1 and No. 2 until later, how shall we go about No. 3? The *only* way we can learn more about real democracy *in time* is by *definite, systematic, united, organized* effort. We must build up an organization among the people for this definite purpose.

The first step for that organization is to put into definite words the exact, fundamental meaning of democracy so that it can serve as the practical, definite standard, test and measure of every concrete issue, great or small.

The second step is to promulgate and teach that standard by an organized campaign using every legitimate means and channel; to make it part of the regular course in every school; to create eventually a Bureau or Department of National and State governments devoted to education in practical democracy and citizenship based on this standard.

The third step is to practise what is preached.

The fourth is to spread the organization until it includes at least a majority of the people, thus making it democratic on a national scale and putting its democratic machinery (to be considered later) into the hands of the people as a whole. A large program? Yes. A small one would, in the coming crisis, be swept away like a straw in a dam-burst. A difficult program? No. Easier than the soviet system. And possibly you may have to choose between the two.

The fifth thing for the organization to do is to remember, and to teach, that it promulgates no new cult or ism but merely the fundamentals, and the logical, insistent development of those fundamentals, of the democracy most of us were born to and neglected; the democracy in which ninety per cent. of us, from the most radical Bolshevist to the well-meaning conservative, will find we believe, once it is clearly seen; the democracy that can get for the people *anything* they want, because it *is* democracy, rule by the people.

The sixth thing for the organization is to remember, and to teach, that neither a democracy or any other form of government can be sound unless the citizens themselves are sound. Whatever its architecture, a sound house can not be built out of rotten bricks. Democracy can live only in the minds of the people.

AS TO making our governing machinery better: The war has taught us the great lesson that present democracy is inefficient, autocracy efficient. Only by autocracizing was democracy able to save itself. How keep democracy yet make it efficient?

The simple answer is that power and control in a democracy as in any other organization must be centered into as few hands as possible if it is to be efficient. That, by itself, means autocracy. Therefore, by itself, it is not enough. It is, to a degree, what we have now. Democracy must be assured by seeing to it that the few who wield this *delegated* power are held inexorably, directly and constantly responsible and responsive to the *fundamental* power and control of the people themselves. That is what we do *not* have now.

In other words, we now lack both efficiency and democracy. We can get both.

Centralizing the delegated power is easy. But if the active fundamental control by the people is not developed at equal pace, democracy becomes autocracy.

Two things will be necessary to put and keep the people in real control over their delegates:

First, machinery—some adaptation of the initiative, referendum and recall; direct elections of such delegates as senators; direct control of cabinet officers; numerous changes in our voting methods (so that a President can no longer be elected in spite of a registered majority vote against him; voters no longer deprived of votes by empty technicalities or eligible in one part of a voting area and not in another; a minority no longer left without a delegated voice in proportion to its numbers;

citizens no longer deprived of voice in their public affairs on the rather humorous ground of sex). In a word, such machinery as will ensure real voice and control to the largest possible numbers of the people. Also such machinery as will give no advantage over others to any individuals, classes, parties or sections. In themselves some of the measures may not appeal to you. But they can not be considered by themselves. They are necessary parts of a tremendous whole and unless we get that tremendous whole—we are lost.

To hold this machinery in its place and to its purpose, there is necessary an enormous development of the civil service reform idea. The nation's business is the biggest, most important business in the country. It should have the best men. It is the people's business; any sacrifice of it for personal, class or party ends must not be tolerated. Graft is treason; inefficiency a waste of the people's blood.

It will be of no avail, however, to put real control into the people's hands unless the people are fit to control. Which brings us back again to the third of the three things we must do.

BUT how to start? How get sufficient control in the beginning to accomplish all these things? How get far enough in the first of those three things to make the second possible?

We could do it with our present democratic machinery if through laziness, selfishness, conceit and ignorance we had not neglected our citizen duties so long that we have half forgotten our powers and rights as well as our duties, let control slip out of our hands and lost faith in our ability to regain control. But it would be slow work to restore that faith sufficiently to key us to the attempt. And the avalanche moves fast. We must find a new and quicker method of getting control of our machinery.

There is such a way, quick, simple, lawful, thoroughly democratic, sure, irresistible.

It can not be put into operation by wishing or sleeping. But it is as easy, and as quick, as the soviet system of the Bolshevists. That, perhaps, will be the crucial test of any plan for turning the avalanche from the force-path into the unbloody path of lawful, democratic method.

The effectiveness, thoroughness and permanent value of this new way lies in the fact that it solves not one but all three of the problems that must be solved if we are to turn the avalanche from the force-path by clearing the other path. In the next issues it will be set forth in its main details. And there will be given an exact definition of fundamental democracy, the inevitable definition that all of us, if we stop to think, know is true.

With that done, the chief work of this department will be finished. The rest lies in *your* hands. If the way seems to you the best way, every duty, every consideration of advantage to yourself and to your fellows, demands that you *act*. If it does not seem to you the best way, then every duty and consideration demands that you find a better one. And *act*. Thus far no other comprehensive way, either better or worse, has been even suggested.

And when an avalanche has started it is well to adopt a plan and to adopt it quickly. To act, and to act quickly.

And if you say there is no avalanche, it is well to be—sure. A. S. H.

NOTE—Since the above was written in the last of February the newspapers of March eleventh have reported the public exposure of the definite, organized campaign for a Bolshevist force-revolution in this country. Any one of open mind and in touch with real conditions knew the attempt was being made or that it surely would be made. And only the blind belittle the seriousness of the danger.

The methods thus far used against it are stupid, medieval, ineffective—or non-existent. Bolshevism is an idea; you can not kill an idea by using force. You can uphold one thing, or destroy another, only in accordance with the strength or weakness of the *idea* back of each and only by upholding the idea back of one and exploding the idea back of the other. The only way you can do either successfully and permanently is by bringing out the *truth* and the *facts* back of each.

Yet the American campaign against the Bolshevist idea has so far consisted chiefly of force, fact suppression, lies, distortion, blind prejudice and ignorance, and our upholding of democracy is being attempted with the same unsound tools.

BOLSHEVISM is an idea, a democratic idea, and an idea that has produced an efficient and democratic piece of machinery. In that idea there is too much democracy, soundness and rightness, all too plausibly presented and too easy and quick of inoculation, for the idea to be swept out of people's minds with a club or fact suppression. The only possible way to beat back Bolshevism is to demolish the idea behind it by using truth and facts. That idea *is* unsound. It is only partially democratic even in theory; in practise it is still less democratic, and in method it subverts the very democracy it purports to further. Truth, facts and clear thinking can demolish it. But to attempt to demolish it by any other method is stupidity. If we tell people it is all evil, later on, when they have inevitably found some of the good that is mixed into it, they will discredit us as liars or fools and turn in distrust from any cause we advocate.

And on this point Bolshevism has all the advantage. For it can sweep into power on its plausible half-truths, by its quick and easy methods and through the ignorance of the people, before its fallacies can be sufficiently made plain to tumble it down. Once in the saddle, it will not be so easy to unseat it, even with truth and facts.

IT ALL boils down to this:

The people (our own like others) want more, and more real, democracy than they have had. Bolsehvism seems to offer the means. Therefore it will draw to itself millions of people—*unless we offer them a better means*.

We haven't. They feel that the present democratic machinery is imperfect and is no longer sufficiently in their own hands. It is their own fault—*our* own fault. But it is true. And we offer them nothing new.

And even if at this eleventh hour we tried to use the present machinery in this crisis, it is probably too late. There is hardly time to get it back into our hands again and learn how to use it effectively and rightly.

To defeat the new and effective Bolshevist machinery we must have something equally new and equally effective. And it must be equally *quick*, equally direct, equally simple, equally promising, more democratic and more sound.

In the next issues we will consider a system that has these qualities.—A. S. H.

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THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

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In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

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Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

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This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

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While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

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Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address Wayne Eberly, 1302 N St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

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(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

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25. Africa Part 2
George E. Holt, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

26. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

27. Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda, and the Upper Congo.
Charles Beadle, Care Authors' League of America, 33 West 42d St., New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

28. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

29. Australia and Tasmania
Albert Goldie, 424 Black Bldg., Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A. All Firearms of Foreign Make (including comparisons between foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 4249a Juniata St., St. Louis, Mo.

B. All Firearms of American Make. D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

Costa Rica

THIS, perhaps the most progressive of the Central American republics, offers every climate, from temperate to torrid. Mining, lumbering, cattle-raising, agriculture, and many other industries are calling Americans to the tropics.

Question:—"I am twenty years of age and a friend of mine of the same age and I expect to leave shortly for Costa Rica.

We desire some information on the following subjects:

1. Travel. Is the jungle far from the seacoast?
2. Customs.
3. Language. Understand it's Spanish, or a mixture of Spanish and Indian. Am I right, Señor?
Game.
5. Local conditions.
6. Minerals, kinds, etc.
7. Trading with people of the interior.
8. Traveling expenses per person from Allentown, Penna., to the best seacoast town in Costa Rica?"—M. H. Reagle, Allentown, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The Republic of Costa Rica has an area of 18,400 square miles and a population of 441,342 (in 1916). Agriculture is the principal industry and bananas and coffee are the principal exports. Transportation facilities are afforded by two railroads, which connect San José, the capital, with the Atlantic port of Limon and the Pacific port of Punta Arenas; by boats on the inlets and rivers of the lowlands and by carts in the highlands. There is an automobile road from San José to Heridia, a distance of seven miles, and one from Cartago to Aguas Calientes should be complete by this time.

The products of Costa Rica are diversified on account of climatic conditions, and the soil is fertile, especially so in the volcanic regions. The coast country on the Atlantic side is low, swampy, and subject to continual rainfall, which makes it ideal for the cultivation of bananas. Bananas also grow, but not so well, on the Pacific coast. Coconuts thrive near the salt water of both coasts, and immense groves (or "walks") of them may be observed near both Limon and Punta Arenas. Proceeding up the slopes of the mountains and observing the classes of vegetation to be found it will be noted that anything that will grow in temperate, sub-tropical, and tropical countries will grow in some part or other of Costa Rica.

The seasons of Costa Rica are variable. The Pacific side of the divide has dry weather from December to May and rains at intervals the rest of the year. On the Atlantic side it rains continually, the rainfall amounting to between 140 and 160 inches in places. Cattle do well in the higher valleys.

The forests offer at least a hundred varieties of hardwoods, most of which are unclassified, including cedar, mahogany (true and false) and cocobolo. The lumbering is carried on mainly by Americans in the most primitive fashion often having the logs hauled for great distances by oxcart. There are about 75 one-horse sawmills in operation in Costa Rica at present which cut on an average of 40,000 B. M. feet per day. However, the lumber they cut is worth about six times the value of a similar amount in this country in normal times.

Many minerals are found in parts of Costa Rica, a quantity of gold and manganese being exported to various countries each year. Silver is also mined and exported.

Costa Rica has in operation about 700 kilometers of railroad (about 450 miles), including branches, all of it being slim gage, 4 feet 6 inches. Parts of this total belong to the government, the Northern Ry. Co., and the Costa Rican Ry. Co. It is all leased to the Costa Rican Ry. Co., which in turn is owned by the United Fruit Co. The headquarters of the management of the railroad is located at Port Limon. It is 103 miles from here up to the capital, San José. Daily passenger service is maintained. See official railway guide for schedule of trains. It is about a six-hours' trip from either Port Limon, on the Atlantic coast, or Punta Arenas, on the Pacific coast, to San José. The United Fruit Co. maintains a weekly freight and passenger service from New York to Port Limon. The fare was something like $90, first-class, the last time I asked them.

Customs: It would depend upon what you intended to import what the customs duties would amount to. Most anything you would want to take in as a traveler would be allowed on the free list. Write the Costa Rican consul-general in New York City for other advice concerning duties.

Spanish and English constitute the languages most spoken in this country. The Spanish is spoken by the native people and the English by West Indian negro laborers on the plantations of the United Fruit Co. In Limon a great number of the inhabitants are negroes who speak English. It is a little hard to understand the patois English these people speak, at first, but in a few days it comes easy. There are a few Indians in the mountains who speak their own language, principally the tribe locally known as the Talamancas, but these also speak Spanish or have some one in the tribe who speaks and understands Spanish. The Spanish of Costa Rica is the ordinary western Spanish. It is not mixed with Indian but is pronounced slightly different than it is in Spain. The difference is about the same as it is between the English spoken here and in England. All educated people speak Spanish the same, and the dialect is more pronounced among the illiterate. The chief point of difference is the pronunciation of z and ll which makes very little difference. (*No, señor, Vd. no tiene razon.*) (No, sir, you are not right.)

Game: Deer, peccary, tapir, various small tigers, conejo pintado, iguana, alligators, monkeys, parrots, armadillos, and various other small animals, birds, and fish. Sharks abound on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, especially at the mouths of the rivers. In 1917 The MacMillan Co. of New York published a good book on natural history of Costa Rica, "A Year of Costa Rican Natural History," by A. S. and P. P. Calvert. The price of the book is $3, and perhaps you could find a copy in your own library or consult one when visiting a larger city. Also write your congressman to have Mr. John Barrett, Director General, Pan American Union, Washington, D. C., forward you free the booklet, "Costa Rica," distributed by them. Also write the Department of Commerce, Latin-American Division, Washington, D. C., for late information concerning this country.

Local conditions: Read the books I have mentioned for general data.

Gold, silver, lead, zinc, manganese, and others are not being mined.

Costa Rica is the farthest south country of Central America, with Guatemala a close second, and to carry on trade with the native people requires getting far back into the interior.

Write the United Fruit Co., 17 Battery Place, for the current fare to Port Limon.

New Canadian Trapper's License Law

THAT information given you by this department be, as nearly as possible, up-to-the-minute, we print the following from Mr. Carson:

CLEAR LAKE, WASH., Feby. 28, 1919.

At the last session of the British Columbia Legislature, an act was passed which precludes the issuing of trappers' licenses to non-residents. Residents licenses were placed at $10.

Also in Alberta a trapper's license for a non-resident costs $25 and $2.50 for a resident.

This contradicts what was published recently in *Adventure* but I have just received the notification, hence the mix-up.

Down the Mississippi

EACH year brings increasing interest in the great river of North America; and thousands, in motor-boats, shanty-boats, house-boats, skiffs, even canoes, start from its upper reaches on the wonderful trip south:

Question:—"I see your name in *Adventure* magazine as an expert on the Mississippi River, shanty-boating, travel on the river, etc. I am a lieutenant in the Navy. I was thinking of taking a year's leave of absence, as I wish to do some studying and make some experiments. Have been in the Navy for eleven years; seen the world in all countries; visited all the large cities and many out-of-way places; have always had a desire to see the old river and spend some time in doing it. Have read all of your stories and others that I could get.

Now for the questions:

What would a good shanty-boat cost, in Cairo, Ill., or Pittsburgh, Pa.? I intend to take my wife and daughter.

Where would you advise me to start from, and what time of year?

Do you use a small launch for towing, or not? If so, what will one cost?

What are the chances for work along the river for an engineer and machinist? I hold a chief engineer's license.

What would the equipment outside of firearms cost?

Where can charts of the river be had; also game laws of the various States along the river?"—B. R. S., U. S. N.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—If you want a year on the Mississippi, straight through, I should suggest that you start in the Spring on the Missouri somewhere. You can go to Fort Benton, Montana, and come right down through to New Orleans, and I don't think you would ever regret it.

Instead of buying a boat, you would build it yourself; it would be about 24 to 26 feet long, 7½ or 8 feet wide, and a scow hull, 2-inch bottom and sides, and braced with trusses fore and aft and across. A galley, a sitting-room, a pair of staterooms, with Pullman bunks, would be about all you would have, but most of the time you would be on the 5-foot decks, bow or stern.

To build such a boat, with roofing cabin, on thin sheeting, would cost hardly more than $50, doing the work mostly yourselves. Sweeps, or long oars would navigate the boat from pins on bow and stern oar-posts.

You would float days, tie up nights and during winds. If you had a 16-foot skiff to run around in, so much the better.

You could start anywhere: Pittsburgh, St. Paul, Sioux Falls, etc. Taking a year to it, you could well afford a week to build your own boat, hiring a carpenter, perhaps, to help. If you bought a boat, it would be $50, $100, perhaps $150; and you might have to look for it from St. Louis to Cairo, paying fares, etc., in spite of the hope of immediately finding one. You could start in a skiff, and take a tent. But the best way is, build your own boat. Plane the lumber, inside and out, white lead and cotton-thread calking for the hull. Summer on lower or Ohio River is hot; but Summer on Missouri or Upper Mississippi comfortable. You could use a small launch instead of a skiff. But skiff, with outboard motor, would serve well, covering it against sinking in hard rains—for it sure rains down the river!

As for work: probably you could get work almost in any town. There is always need for men in sawmills, shops, gins, factories, etc., down the Mississippi; a machinist, with a knack at caring for gasoline engines, would pick up odd jobs clear down. Government works (revetment, dredging, levee, etc.) offer opportunities. A chief engineer could doubtless find work wherever there is machinery from railroad round-house to passenger-packet and river ferry.

The U. S. Engineer Office, Kansas City, Mo., charts of Missouri, and the Mississippi River Commission, St. Louis, Mo., for Mississippi River charts. These 1-inch to the mile maps are best. In any event, the caving banks, washing sandbars, and changed river channel makes your navigation an adventure, but you soon learn to read the muddy current, crossings, etc.

Get a report of the Mississippi River Commission, St. Louis, Mo., or the Chief Engineers, U. S. A., Washington, D. C.

For game laws, write for Farmer's Bulletin, 1010, U. S. Dept. Agriculture, Washington, D. C., which contains list of addresses to write for additional information.

Equipment would consist of, say, 10-cent-store cooking, eating utensils; cook stove, heater; bedding, double and single cots, or very cheap iron bedstead and cot, unless you put in folding bunks; 200 feet of rope for mooring and anchor line, inch, and as much handy line, ½ inch, in case of cordelling.

I should say $200 would build boat and equip it, and put on a month or two of grub. It takes about two weeks to a month to get used to the shanty-boat; the less duffle you have, the better; the smaller the boat, the easier handled; decks should be flush, and slope down from the cabin enough to drain overboard and to be tight from rains, which are very heavy.

If you want a taste of wilderness, start from Fort Benton; if you want to see the Middle West, from St. Paul; but you can hardly start amiss; and be sure and equip your boat with copper or rustless mosquito netting of very fine mesh; fine wire cloth would, perhaps, be best if your are going to have Summer weather afloat.

Ranching in Alaska

ALASKA is a virgin field for ranching; and, according to Mr. Solomons, who has lived in our northern territory many years, ranching is the big coming industry there. Incidentally, how many white men do you guess at present occupy this territory, which is larger than New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Texas?

Question:—"For the past five years my 'buddy' and I have been planning a trip to Alaska in the hopes of locating some ranch land. On account of both of us being in the Army it will not be possible until the end of the present emergency. However, as his outfit is Pack Train No. 4 and mine Fld. Hosp. No. 101, and as we can not discuss the matter, each has been gathering all the information possible. You will see the results.

As our mode of travel has always been by horse, I ask if it would be practicable in Alaska.

Are the conditions in Alaska favorable (the year round) for the raising of cattle on the open range?

Would a man be able to raise enough calves to offset those killed by wild beasts, etc.?

What are the prospects of a market for same?

Is the population too thick to run cattle on a fairly large scale?

What are the laws regarding the taking up of tracts of land in Alaska?

If possible, will you name and estimate the population and such sections as would be especially suitable for running cattle?"—JAMES CHRISTIE, A. E. F.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—Travel with horses is practicable in Summer nearly anywhere in Alaska, and it is about the only means, away from the rivers. In Winter, however, horses are expensive and hard to protect from the weather.

There is feed nearly all over that can be cut for Winter if one winters in a given place. But the Winters are so long and the Summers so short, comparatively, that this is rather an irksome business and doesn't pay if it can be avoided. It is usually better to buy or hire an old skate or two for Summer use.

In ranching it is different, of course, and the horse proposition is an essential one for ranch and farm work.

Consider conditions in Montana and you will have a fair idea of ranching conditions in southern and central Alaska; and that will pretty well answer most of your questions. Ranching is going to be a BIG industry in Alaska in the future. Already many are going into it, but it will be years before the country will be anything less than a fine virgin field.

I suggest your writing the Departments of the Interior and of Agriculture at Washington, D. C., for their pamphlets covering these subjects. You will receive for nothing accurate, detailed and valuable knowledge of all sorts.

As to population: there are only twenty or thirty thousand white men in the whole country all the year around, in an area one-fifth the size of the United States, so you may judge that "population" will not be likely to interfere with running cattle for a mighty long time. The islands and the big southern valleys are the present field that is most readily to be utilized.

The land laws are the same as in the United States proper, but there are regulations which specially favor the settler. You will do well to investigate the subject; but I warn you in advance that while the opportunities are immense, there is no prospect of immediate riches. It is an undertaking that will require some years of patient industry and great intelligence. And the market must be created, since there are so few consumers at present locally.

Small Arms of the Old Western Frontier

CONCERNING the "sleeve draw," used in the early days by derringer experts; also the shoulder holster, which enabled many a man to get the "drop" on his enemy:

Question:—"I have heard of men carrying revolvers in slings under their coats near the armpit—not shoulder holsters, but slings.

What is a sling made of and how is it arranged?

Also, the old-time gamblers worked a 'sleeve draw' with their small derringers. How was it done? And how were the arms concealed?

What is the 'up and down' frontier firing motion?

What caliber revolver is carried by the N. W. Mounted Police? What make and caliber is their rifle?

Does the .450 Ely cartridge make a gun kick as hard as our .45 Colts?"—CHAS. RACHOUT, Jackson, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—As to carrying the revolver in a sling, I am under the impression that a shoulder holster was meant, but that a local term was used to distinguish it. I have heard the shoulder holster so called in Oklahoma Territory during my residence there, but the men thus terming it were using frontier slang, such as when they called the old Frontier Colt a "hogleg," due to its triangular shape in a holster.

If such a thing as a sling, properly named, was ever used, I never saw nor heard of one, but the shoulder holster, worn loosely, comes pretty near to being a sling: it swings freely, and the draw from it is fearfully fast and effective.

The "sleeve draw" is a thing we have heard of, but I never personally knew of a man that used it. I have heard, however, that the person using this method of carrying a weapon had a large elastic band or rubber under the sleeve, and that the gun was held to the wrist by it.

You can readily see that a very swift draw would be possible if the butt of the revolver or Derringer were near the mouth of the sleeve, and not too strongly held by the retaining band.

The "up-and-down" firing has reference to the means used generally in cocking and firing the old single-action Colt. The gun being usually worn on the right hip, it was drawn with a sweeping motion, and raised to a level with the shoulder of the firer, or perhaps higher. Then the thumb was hooked about the ponderous hammer, and the weight of the gun being sufficient to cock it, as it was pivoted upon the second finger of the firing hand, lying behind the trigger guard. This was the means used largely in cocking the arm, the drawing of the trigger being done as the sights fell into line, or the general direction of the killee, as was often the case.

I have been informed that the R. N. W. M. P. use the Colt New Service revolver in .455 caliber with 5½-inch barrel, and the .303 Ross carbine.

I have never fired more than a few shots from the .450 Ely, but the recoil was decidedly less than that of the Colt .45. You know the powder charge is very light as compared with the Colt.

Trade with Portuguese East Africa

MANY American eyes are turned toward foreign trade. Africa offers a vast field for American products:

Question:—"What can you tell me about the exporters and importers in Portuguese East Africa? What commodities are shipped into the country? And what are its exports? Would it be possible to get a list of shippers doing business there?"—F. L. V., New York City.

Answer, by Mr. Waring:—A large quantity of goods, probably the bulk of the merchandise in and out of Portuguese East Africa, merely passes through that country en route to and from the more important possessions of the British, viz: Natal, Orange River Colony, the Transvaal, and Rhodesia.

Portuguese East Africa has a coast line of 1,400 miles, all of which acts as a barrier to the British possessions, in that all of their imports and exports passes through Portuguese territory, with the exception of a two or three acre tract of land at Chinde, on one of the mouths of the Zambesi leased to the British for Customs purposes. Chinde acts as the port for British Nyassaland, commonly known as British Central Africa.

Beira is the seaport for Rhodesia, and Delagoa Bay for the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal.

The Societe de Madal with stations at Mocambique, Angoche, and Quellimane, are shippers of copra, ground nuts, rubber, ebony, and mangal. The Mocambique Company and the Companhia Zambezia are also large importers and exporters at Beira and Quellimane respectively.

The best way for you to secure a complete list, which would include the British possessions in the interior, would be to obtain a copy of Kelly's directory of Importers and Exporters. This of course is and English publication and very complete, practically covering the world.

The Philadelphia Commercial Museum could also supply you with this information.

There are some large sugar plantations on the Buzi River at Beira, and there are also some large ones on the Zambesi River.

The Maine Wilderness

VIRGIN forests still call sportsmen to the largest New England State. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountain climbing—take your choice:

Question:—"I expect to take a hunting trip in Maine.

Where are bears to be found? Does a non-resident need guides? How long residence is needed for a resident license?

What route would you suggest for a wilderness canoe trip? What would such a trip cost, and how long would it take? What is the best time of year for such a trip?"—G. P. Richardson, A. E. F., France.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There have been quite a good many bear shot in Maine this season, and reports go to show that they have been fairly plentiful in many parts of the State. Quite a few have gone through the Bangor Station, where I happen to be Game Inspector. Some of these come from Washington County, and some from Aroostook, and Penobscot County.

I spent part of the Summer in Oxford and Franklin Counties and I found many signs of bear in that section.

Non-residents are required by law to employ a registered guide when hunting in this State. I think a residence of six months in the State would get you by so you would not be required to employ a guide, or have a non-resident's hunting-license. The license for a non-resident costs $15.

There are several very desirable canoe trips in the northern part of the State. The longest is the St. John and Allegash River trip. This trip can be made in a month, and takes one through the wildest part of the State. It starts in at N. W. Carry at the head of Moosehead Lake, and ends at Fort Kent on the St. John River. This trip is through the best hunting and fishing section of the State, and for the most part is through nearly virgin wilderness.

The next longest trip is called the Allegash Canoe trip. This trip, while not as long, is through a wonderful fish and game country. It can be made in two weeks, but three or four are better.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

LINDROT, ALEXANDER. "Red Alex". Born in Bohustan, Sweden. About 47 years old. Last heard of in 1904 around Hibbing, Virginia, Eveleth, or Buhl, and the Mesaba Iron Range, Minnesota. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated by his old friend.—Address Anders Wm. Carlen, 2026 Lexington Ave., New York City.

GATES, WALTER C., of Wanakena, N. Y. Last heard of was with Barnum & Bailey's. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address W. F. S., care *Adventure*.

EGAN, D. JACK. About 50 years of age, dark, 5 feet 10 in., weighs about 180 pounds. Barber by trade. Last heard of working in Coughlan's Ship Yards, Vancouver, B. C., May, 1918. Worked in Hotel Jaffery, B. C. in 1915. Any information will be appreciated by his old pal.—Address J. Frank Woods, 5458 California Ave., Seattle, Washington.

DICKEY, HUBERT. Last heard of in Kansas City, Mo., Nov. 2, 1912. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Field Massey, 1213 Ash St., Atchison, Kansas.

MOODY, EARL W. Last heard of from Co. D, 14th Inf., Fort Davis, Alaska. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address FRED E. DWELLO, L. B. 34, Granville, N. Dak.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

DELAMATIR, IRVING H. Ex-soldier, nurse and doctor. Last heard of in Poughkeepsie, four years ago. Money left him. Any one knowing his whereabouts or last address please write to—Address ANDREAS MARTLING, care *Adventure.*

BEYRSDOFFER, A. Called Joe Bush. Write your old pal. Am out of the army now and home. Write or telegraph.—L. B. STANALAND, 118 State St., Montgomery, Ala.

COE, C. A. Last heard of in Sabine, Texas, 1917, on the U. S. S. *Comanche.* Please write your old shipmate.—Address A. M. BARLOW, 2182 West 31st St., Cleveland, Ohio.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

BURDICK, E. C. Last heard of in Galveston, Texas, 1917, on the U. S. S. *Comanche.* Please write your old shipmate.—Address A. M. BARLOW, 2182 West 31st St., Cleveland, Ohio.

NEIN, WM. (Billy). Last seen or heard of in Los Angeles, Calif., three years ago. Camp Cook, blond, red cheeks, short and chunky build, well known on the Pacific coast. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HERMAN GROBLER, 160 3rd St., Alta Hotel, San Francisco, Calif.

KELLY, THOMAS FRANCIS. About 5 ft. 6 in. tall, brown hair, blue eyes, red mustache, and a bad scar on bridge of nose and left side of upper lip. A good singer and great reader. Any information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated.—Address MRS. KELLY, 88 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, Mass.

GALLAWAY, KARL H. Last seen in Texarkana, Texas, February, 1913. Any information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by his aunt.—Address MRS. C. C. GALLAWAY, Rockland, Texas.

DUCETTE, HECTOR. Last heard of M. P. Caarida, 1916. U. S. Army, 1915 and Canal Zone before. Age about 36; dark; about 6 feet. Any information will be appreciated by relatives.—Address MRS. C. HAYES, 392 10th St., So. Brooklyn, N. Y.

DICKINSON, C. L. Last heard of in Lima, Ohio, 1916, with the Lima Locomotive and Machine Company. Will you communicate with brother.—Address M. D. DICKINSON, U. S. N. Hospital, Las Animas, Colo.

ALRAREZ, M. H. No. 2005542 Canadian Engineers. Went to France in 1917. Mother thought to be living in New York City. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address J. CHATRAIRE, Box 1244, Edmonton, Canada.

TEBOW, RALPH E. Last heard of at Boremerton, Washington, when discharged from U. S. S. *Saratoga* in February, 1916. Served on board the U. S. S. *Helena* on Yangtze River as boatswain's mate, second class, in 1914 and 1915. Believed to have lived in California. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his old friend.—Address LINTON WELLS, 315 14th St., Denver, Colo.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First-May or Mid-May issues of Adventure. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

AMBROSE, SHRIS; Anderson, Andy; Berman, Herman, A.; Blesh, Rudolf P.; Nicholson, Color Sergeant; Brown, Clayton; Bush, Jack; Welch, Red; Wilensky; Byars, Alexander Terry; Cooper, Ted; Costello, Jack; Dalton, George; Dominick, Mac; Hart, Jack; Haynes, Eddie; Baker, Lee; Houghton Frank Wentworth; Hourahan, John C.; Johnson, J. H.; King, Wm. Benedeil; McMahon, Michael; Mohan, Art; Monroe, C.; Olson, Hjalmar; Parker, Charles A.; Scott, Harry; Shaw, Sylvester, Elmer; Taylor, Alfred; Wilson, Montgomery Earl.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Cole Williams; G. H. Bennett; Bryon Chrisholm.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. —Address J. E. Cox, care *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-JUNE ADVENTURE

Seven vigorous stories come to you with the Mid-June *Adventure*, on the stands May 18th, besides the three mentioned in the ad. on page 2.

DEPTHS WITHIN DEPTHS ***By Gordon Young***
A story of California in the old days.

AN ECHO ***By S. B. H. Hurst***
In the white silence of the arctic night a man stumbles into camp—without sled or dogs.

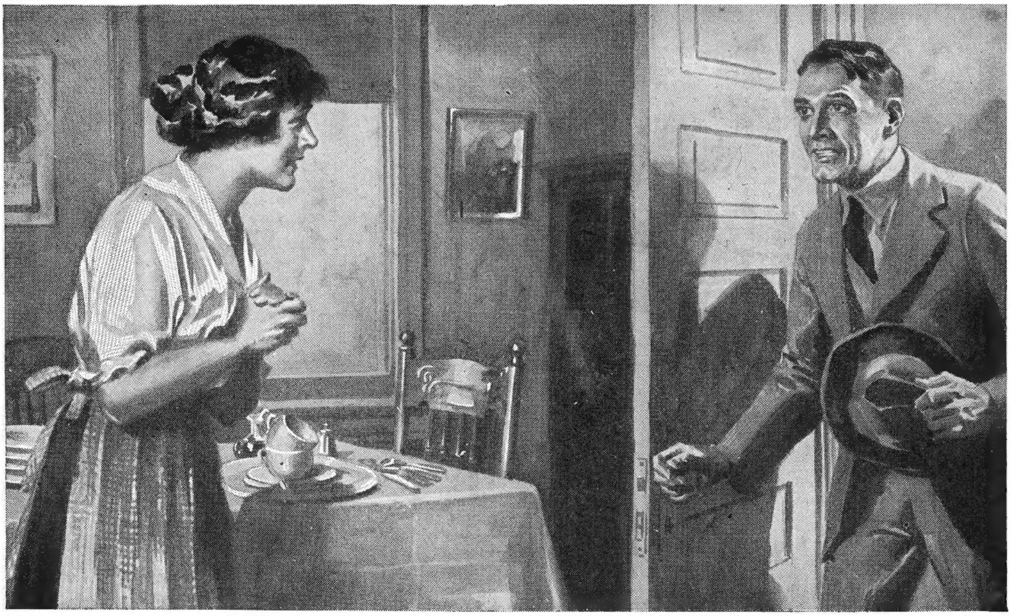
THE GREAT WHITE DAYONG ***By Gordon McCreagh***
Two men in the jungle of Borneo—and a dangerous secret.

ON THE TRAIL OF TIPPOO TIB. A six-part story. Part IV. ***By Talbot Mundy***
With the hidden ivory yet unfound, *Yerkes* and his comrades find many perils before them.

THE DOUBLE-CROSSING OF DOBIE ***By W. C. Tuttle***
In which *Dobie* takes his pen in hand to inform you of the trials and tribulations of this earthly existence.

THE SPIRIT OF HIS YOUTH ***By Romaine H. Lowdermilk***
Blizzards on the prairie are bad things.

DAN KURRIE'S INNING ***By Russell A. Boggs***
A story of railroads and railroad men.



"I Got the Job!"

"I'm to be Manager of my Department starting Monday. The boss said he had been watching all the men. When he found I had been studying at home with the International Correspondence Schools he knew I had the right stuff in me—that I was bound to make good. Now we can move over to that house on Oakland Avenue and you can have a maid and take things easy. I tell you, Nell, taking that course with the I. C. S. was the best thing I ever did."

Spare-time study with the I. C. S. is winning promotions for thousands of men and bringing happiness to thousands of homes all over the world. In offices, shops, stores, mines, mills and on railroads, I. C. S. trained men are stepping up to big jobs, over the heads of older men, past those whose only qualification is long service.

There is a job ahead of *you* that some man is going to be picked for. The boss can't take chances. When he selects the one to hold it he is going to choose a trained man with sound, practical knowledge of the work. Get busy right now and put yourself in line for that promotion. You can do it in spare time in your own home through the International Correspondence Schools, just as nearly two million men have done in the last twenty-eight years, just as more than 100,000 men are doing today.

The first step these men took was to mark and mail this coupon. Make *your* start the same way—and make it right now.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX2005B, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, *before* which I mark X.

☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
☐ Electric Lighting and Railways
☐ Electric Wiring
☐ Telegraph Engineer
☐ Telephone Work
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice
☐ Toolmaker
☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
☐ Marine Engineer
☐ Ship Draftsman
☐ ARCHITECT
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
☐ Sheet Metal Worker
☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
☐ CHEMIST
☐ SALESMANSHIP
☐ ADVERTISING
☐ Window Trimmer
☐ Show Card Writer
☐ Sign Painter
☐ Railroad Trainman
☐ ILLUSTRATING
☐ Cartooning
☐ BOOKKEEPER
☐ Stenographer and Typist
☐ Cert. Public Accountant
☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
☐ Railway Accountant
☐ Commercial Law
☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ Teacher
☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Mathematics
☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING
☐ Auto Repairing
☐ Navigation
☐ AGRICULTURE
☐ Poultry Raising
☐ Spanish
☐ French
☐ Italian

Name ____________________

Present Occupation ____________________

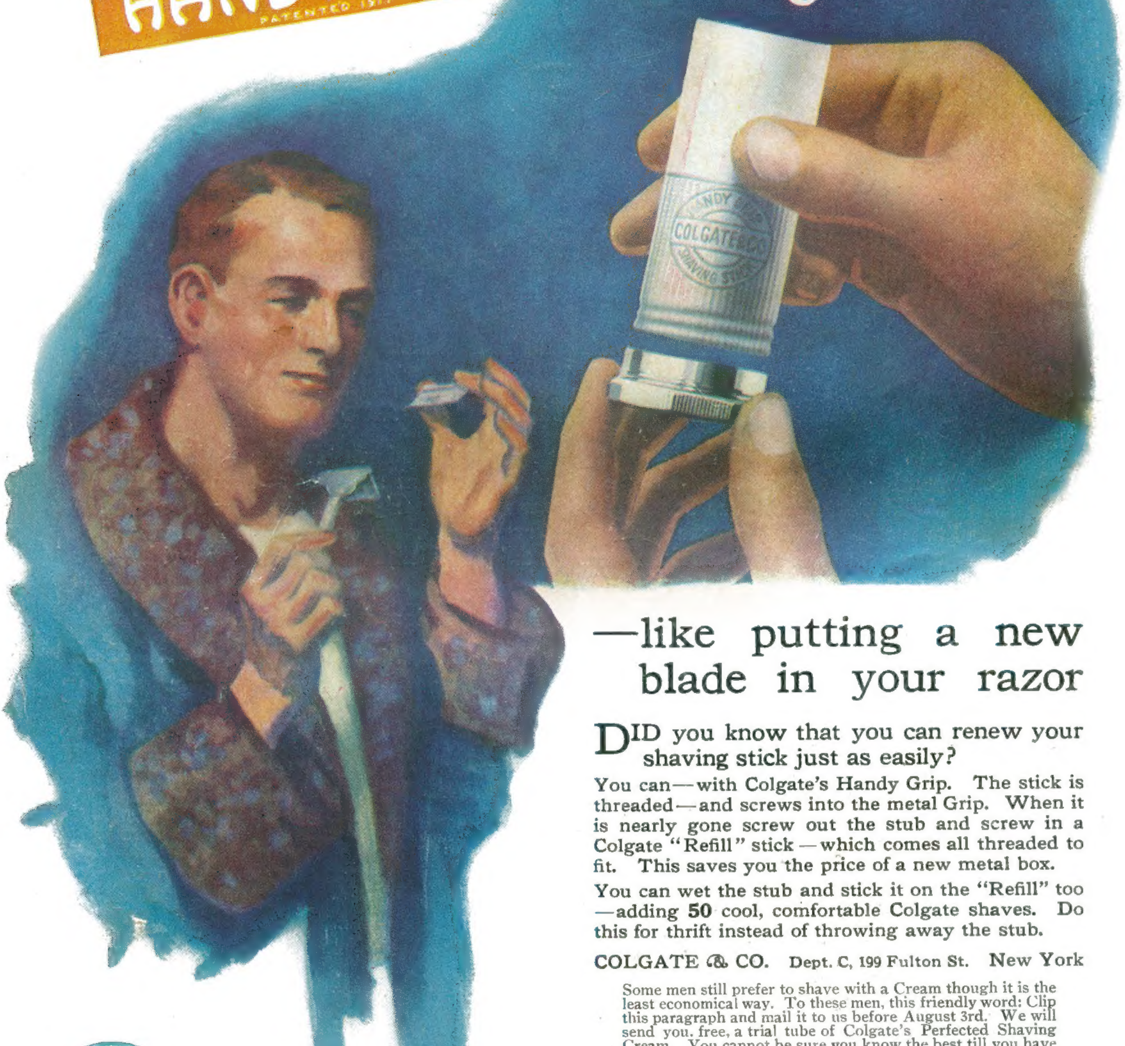
Street and No. ____________________

City ____________________ State __________

COLGATE'S

"HANDY GRIP" Saving Stick

PATENTED 1917



—like putting a new blade in your razor

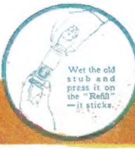
DID you know that you can renew your shaving stick just as easily?

You can—with Colgate's Handy Grip. The stick is threaded—and screws into the metal Grip. When it is nearly gone screw out the stub and screw in a Colgate "Refill" stick—which comes all threaded to fit. This saves you the price of a new metal box.

You can wet the stub and stick it on the "Refill" too—adding **50** cool, comfortable Colgate shaves. Do this for thrift instead of throwing away the stub.

COLGATE & CO. Dept. C, 199 Fulton St. New York

Some men still prefer to shave with a Cream though it is the least economical way. To these men, this friendly word: Clip this paragraph and mail it to us before August 3rd. We will send you, free, a trial tube of Colgate's Perfected Shaving Cream. You cannot be sure you know the best till you have used Colgate's. But we give you the impartial advice to use the Handy Grip as the most convenient and economical way to shave. We *can* do this impartially as we make all three forms of shaving soap—Stick, Powder and Cream.



Wet the old stub and press it on the "Refill" —it sticks.

The only Refill Shaving Stick